

Under this organisation 376 heavy and 592 light anti-aircraft guns were deployed in addition to a large number of Bofors manned by the R.A.F. Regiment. Throughout the month of August, too, coastal forces from the Royal Navy carried out anti-flying bomb patrols in the English Channel under the code names Operation Watch and Operation Bonnet I.

Although these measures against the new weapon very rapidly attained a high degree of efficiency the campaign continued in full swing for two and a half months.¹

Between 13th June and 5th September 6,705 flying bombs were plotted. Of these 3,497 were destroyed, 1,755 by fighters, 1,464 by anti-aircraft guns, 241 by barrage balloons and 37 by 'other causes'. Although most of the missiles were directed against London some were aimed at Portsmouth and Southampton. Altogether between 13th June and 5th September 2,312 or 34 per cent reached the target area.

For many weeks south-east England stood up gallantly to this intensive bombardment and though the threat of the flying bomb was ever present day and night never was there any variation in the Allied plan of campaign merely for the purpose of bringing the menace to an end. By the beginning of September welcome relief was at hand, for early in the month the British armies virtually ended the flying bomb campaign by sweeping through northern France and Belgium right up to the estuary of the River Schelde.²

22. Allied strategy : broad front policy

When therefore the Allied armies streamed across the Seine during the last week in August, the end of the intensive flying bomb campaign was well in sight.

Towards the end of the month the current appreciation of German capabilities suggested that enemy resistance in western Europe was on the very verge of collapse. It was obvious that the Germans would have to produce fresh divisions from other fronts, and from Germany, if they were to succeed in preventing an Allied advance far into the Reich.

Their preoccupation with the flying bomb launching sites in Flanders and their dependence on the Ruhr and Saar for military supplies suggested they would concentrate the preponderance of their available resources to the north, leaving the remainder to delay the American advance towards Metz. How best, then, could this situation be exploited and the war brought rapidly to a triumphant end?

In the view of Field-Marshal Montgomery one powerful full-blooded thrust across the Rhine into the very heart of Germany, backed by the whole strength of the Allied armies, offered the best opportunity of achieving rapid and decisive results. There appeared to be two feasible axes along which such a thrust could be mounted, the first through Belgium and across the Rhine into the open plains of northern Germany; the second through Metz and the Saar into central Germany. The Field-Marshal favoured the northern route and hoped to reach Berlin provided the thrust could be backed by a sufficient concentration of maintenance resources. The third course open to the Allies on crossing the Seine was a drive on a broad front to the Rhine. This implied lining up the Allied

Armies along the Rhine and then developing operations for the capture of the Ruhr and Frankfurt areas. The main point of difference in the plans was that the broad front policy avoided the risks of a long range operation on a relatively narrow front, but, on the other hand, it clearly involved a slower and more deliberate campaign.

The Supreme Commander eventually decided on the broad front, for he had come to the conclusion that it was not feasible to concentrate adequate administrative resources to carry the Allies in sufficient strength on a narrow front across the Rhine deep into the heart of Germany. The Allied lines of communication still stretched rearwards to the Normandy beaches and Cherbourg peninsula. The opening of a suitably placed deep-water port, such as Antwerp, was therefore an essential step to the making of a final all-out assault across the western frontier of the Third Reich. General Eisenhower's orders laid down that the Allied armies should line up along the Rhine and establish bridgeheads wherever possible but that operations would not be developed further east until the port of Antwerp had been captured and opened. The immediate tasks confronting Field-Marshal Montgomery under this plan were the destruction of the enemy in north-eastern France, the clearance of the Pas de Calais with its flying bomb sites, the capture of airfields in Belgium, and the opening of the port of Antwerp. The early stages of the plan worked admirably. After the Allied armies had crossed the Seine the speed of advance was so great that the armoured cars of the Guards Armoured Division crossed the Belgian frontier in the early hours of 3rd September.¹ During the afternoon Hal, a small town some twelve miles short of Brussels, was reached in the face of sporadic resistance and before nightfall the whole Division was in the capital.

Meanwhile the town of Dieppe had been occupied by the Canadians on 1st September after its inhabitants had joyfully watched the Germans depart the previous day. Thus, by a happy stroke of fortune Canadians, who had suffered 3,363 casualties at Dieppe in August 1942,² were the first Allied troops to reoccupy the town two years later in September 1944. Why, on this occasion, the enemy decided not to defend this important port is not known but his mistake was destined to prove of great value to the Allies during the next few months. Although the Germans had tamely evacuated Dieppe they had taken good care to obstruct it before their departure. Three blockships and eighteen wrecks littered the harbour but a five day search for enemy mines and explosive charges had negative results. The first convoy entered Dieppe on 7th September and before long the port was handling 7,000 tons of cargo a day, which was far more than its peace time average.

Unlike the German garrison at Dieppe, the enemy garrisons of Boulogne and Calais offered tough resistance³ but the Pas de Calais with its flying bomb launching sites was in Allied hands within a few hours. Further east, the Flemish ports of Ostend, Nieuport, and Ghent were all occupied on 10th September, and Bruges on the 12th. Ostend harbour was blocked by fourteen wrecks, but its E-boat pens, which were intact, provided a valuable base for allied coastal craft. Within fifteen days the port was open and on the 25th the first merchant ships entered the harbour. The port of Boulogne was in a much worse state than either

¹ Plan 10.

² Fig. 8, p. 38.

¹ Fig. 8, p. 38.

² *Battle Summary No. 33*, Raid on Dieppe, 14th August 1942.

³ Boulogne fell on 22nd September and Calais on 30th September.

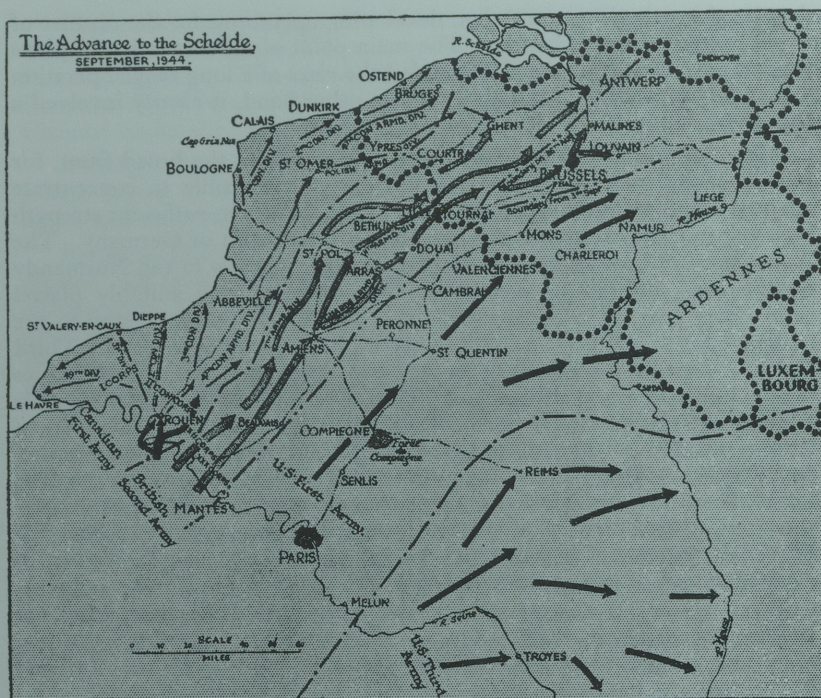


Fig. 8

Ostend or Dieppe. Twenty-five wrecks fouled the harbour, and twenty-six blockships closed its entrance, which remained blocked until the *Guernsey Queen* was raised on 18th November. The port of Calais came into use two days later but valuable as these ports were they were quite unable to handle more than a small part of the essential military supplies required by the armies in the field.

Meanwhile on 4th September, the Allies had scored a dazzling triumph by comparison with which the clearing of the Pas de Calais and the unopposed occupation of Dieppe fade into insignificance. That day the British Second Army stormed into the magnificent port of Antwerp, the largest in Europe and one of the greatest in the world,¹ before the enemy had time to wreck or even obstruct it.

At the time, Cherbourg, as yet the only major port actually working for the Allies in northern France, already lay far behind the Allied lines. True it was handling half its normal capacity, but the lines leading from it were totally incapable of maintaining the Allied armies in the field. More than 2,000,000 men, 400,000 vehicles and 3,000,000 tons of stores were already ashore, but most of them had been landed over the Normandy beaches or through the Mulberry harbour at Arromanches, both of which would be of doubtful value during the winter. The port of Antwerp and its installations, unlike the port of Cherbourg, were taken almost intact but, as at Cherbourg, there was a vast difference between capturing Antwerp and using it as a supply port in the service of the Allies.

¹ Fig. 9, p. 40.

23. Red Ball Highways

During the critical period between the capture of Antwerp and the opening of the Schelde the Allied supply services made heroic and effective efforts to keep the armies going in the field by instituting a fast, one-way, traffic system, known as the Red Ball Highways. Although this system covered the main road routes of northern France, the rapid advance of over 200 miles from the Seine to the Schelde within a few days had thrown an almost intolerable strain on the long drawn out Allied lines of communication.

The Red Ball Highways, so called because they were marked everywhere with a red ball, eventually stretched all the way from Normandy to Holland and to the borders of the Reich itself. Theirs is the epic story of a great achievement. On them military supplies were carried night and day, for they were entirely closed to any other form of traffic. Notices on large boards along the routes instructed drivers to 'Get on, or get off the Road'. A breakdown meant 'ditching' to clear the roads for following vehicles. Relief drivers, recruited from every unit able to provide them, took over while their vehicles were in motion. Great tank transporters thundered along with constantly flashing 'red ball' lights which gave them absolute priority. Every vehicle ran at least twenty hours a day and was allowed to halt only for loading, unloading and servicing. Wear and tear of vehicles and road surfaces and the strain on the drivers was enormous. It was obvious such a system could not be prolonged indefinitely. The shortening of the Allied line of communication was therefore a matter of the utmost urgency. In spite of this, however, land and sea operations for opening up the newly captured port of Antwerp were held up during September while a bold attempt was made to establish a bridgehead over the Lower Rhine at Arnhem in order to outflank the Siegfried Line in readiness for an invasion of northern Germany.

24. Battle of Arnhem, 17th-26th September

By the beginning of September Field-Marshal Model, who following the suicide of von Kluge had temporarily taken over the German Western Command, had managed to rally his demoralised forces and re-establish a front line in the west. Thus during the first half of the month the United States First Army encountered ever increasing opposition. By the middle of the month, however, it was in contact with the defences of the Siegfried Line and ready to continue its advance to Bonn and Cologne as soon as conditions allowed. Further south General Patton's United States Third Army had established bridgeheads over the Moselle south of Metz but no immediate advance to the Rhine was to be expected.

It was clear, however, that if sufficient strength could be concentrated and maintained for the task, one powerful and full blooded thrust over the Lower Rhine would enable the Allies to establish a suitable bridgehead for a subsequent advance to occupy the Ruhr. It was agreed that Field-Marshal Montgomery's British Twenty-first Army Group should defer clearing the banks of the Schelde estuary and launch the thrust with the utmost rapidity and violence without regard to events on the flanks. This, in effect, was the Field Marshal's original narrow front policy on a greatly reduced scale. The essential part of the plan was the outflanking of the Siegfried defences. As this necessitated crossing the Neder Rijn, or



Fig. 9

Lower Rhine, the spearhead of the whole operation lay at Arnhem,¹ the capital of the province of Gelderland, where the river is spanned by a modern single arch bowstring road bridge, and by a pontoon bridge. A bridge carrying the railway from Arnhem to Nijmegen lies at Oosterbeek two miles further west.

In order to establish the bridgehead north of the Lower Rhine the British XXX Corps, preceded by the Guards Armoured Division, was to advance northwards from the Allied Escaut Canal bridgehead for more than sixty miles along a narrow corridor through Eindhoven to Son, Veghel, Grave, Nijmegen and Arnhem. From the Arnhem bridgehead, in due course, the British Second Army would break down the last remaining defences of the Reich. This manoeuvre, if successful, would allow the

¹ Plan 3.

Allies to strike where the enemy was least likely to expect an offensive. The proposed route lay across four major waterways, in addition to the Lower Rhine. They were the Waal (or Rhine) at Nijmegen, the Mass (or Meuse) at Grave, and two main transverse canals, the Zuid Willemsvaart Canal at Son and the Wilhelmina Canal at Veghel, between the Escaut Canal and Grave.

Unfortunately no rapid advance along this corridor could be expected. In the low lying swamps of the Netherlands tanks could only leave the roads at grave peril of becoming bogged. It was therefore of vital importance that the river and canal bridges along the road should be captured intact and held till the ground forces were able to reach them. This difficult task could be undertaken only by airborne troops, which were to be provided by the Allied airborne corps and consisted of one British and two American airborne divisions in addition to the Polish Parachute Brigade.

As success at Arnhem depended on the success of the Eindhoven and Nijmegen airborne forces, these were given priority of available aircraft. This involved dropping the Arnhem force of 8,969 officers and men in two lifts. The first was to seize the main road bridge and, if possible, the pontoon and railway bridges down stream; the second was to surround the town of Arnhem itself. The plan also included a very heavy scale of air escort and support. It involved provision for bridging on a vast scale and the bridging resources were assembled in the Bourg-Leopold area ready to be called forward when required.

It was already becoming increasingly clear the enemy was rapidly organising a co-ordinated defence system, and after preparation had gone forward with the utmost drive and energy the target date of the attack, the greatest single airborne operation of the war, was fixed for Sunday 17th September. That morning vast fleets of aircraft and gliders flying direct from the United Kingdom in ideal weather converged on the dropping and landing zones.¹ At 1300 the British 1st and the American 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions were dropped in columns, from north to south, according to plan. Complete surprise was achieved and only light opposition encountered. Thus the initial attack at Arnhem succeeded and the northern end of the main Arnhem road bridge was quickly captured.

Further south the United States 82nd Airborne Division, after seizing the bridge over the Maas at Grave, secured two bridges over the Maas-Waal canal between Grave and Nijmegen. Meanwhile paratroops of the United States 101st Airborne Division had rapidly established themselves at Son, between Eindhoven and St. Oedenrode, and had secured the Zuid Willemsvaart canal bridge at Veghel, north-east of St. Oedenrode.

That afternoon the Guards Armoured Division, after hard fighting during an advance of six miles northwards astride the Eindhoven road, captured the village of Valkenswaard. The advance from Valkenswaard was resumed at 0600 next morning, the 18th, and in the face of fierce opposition the armoured cars made contact with elements of the U.S. 101st Airborne Division north-west of Eindhoven. The battle for Eindhoven itself raged with unabated fury and though the Americans were the first into the town it was the Guards who finally broke the enemy's resistance. The advance of the Guards was then pressed on towards Son. Meanwhile further north the U.S. 82nd Airborne Division had unsuccessfully attempted to advance from the Maas-Waal Canal and reach the Nijmegen bridges. Further north still, elements of the British 1st Airborne

¹ Fig. 10, p. 42.

Division were valiantly holding the main Arnhem road bridge, which so far had remained intact, though the enemy was holding the town in strength. Unfortunately the reinforcements for the division arrived four hours late and were virtually surrounded at the western exits of the town. By the end of the day the division had become scattered and the flying-in of its supplies had failed through low visibility and heavy enemy flak.



Fig. 10

By 0900 next morning, the 19th, the Guards Armoured Division had crossed the Wilhelmina Canal at the Son bridge, advanced another twenty-five miles to the north-east and linked up with the U.S. 82nd Airborne Division at the Grave bridge. Their next objective was Nijmegen, which stands on a hilly promontory eleven miles south of Arnhem and eight miles north-east of Grave. Here the River Waal is crossed by a railway bridge 1,500 feet long with lattice girder spans carrying two electrified tracks. A single arch bowstring bridge carries the main Grave-Arnhem road over the river. That day enemy action again delayed the attack but at 1845

the British armour broke into the town of Nijmegen though it failed to reach the Nijmegen bridges.

Meanwhile eleven miles away to the north elements of the scattered British Airborne Division were endeavouring to concentrate four miles west of the Arnhem bridge. By this time the weather had deteriorated with disastrous results. The concentration of enemy forces, in particular at Arnhem, had continued rapidly, while reinforcement of the British Arnhem bridgehead forces had virtually ceased.

Next day two major problems faced Field-Marshal Montgomery. First the necessity for reinforcing the 82nd Airborne Division and securing the Nijmegen bridgehead, and second the imperative necessity of relieving the 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem.

During the morning Anglo-American forces gradually cleared the town of Nijmegen including the southern approaches to the bridges. By the evening, after a fierce struggle which had raged furiously all day, U.S. paratroopers had crossed the river under withering fire in assault boats and captured the northern end of the railway bridge. On seeing the Stars and Stripes flying defiantly from the far end of the bridge the Guards launched a head-on tank attack which carried both bridges. The enemy demolition charges were removed and the last defenders eliminated.

Plans were now made to push the remaining eleven miles north to Arnhem and for five days more, in the face of disastrous weather conditions and bitter enemy resistance, every possible effort was made to relieve the hard pressed Arnhem bridgehead. Most unfortunately, however, the weather not only delayed the dropping of the Polish Parachute Brigade, the vital airborne link between Nijmegen and Arnhem, till 21st September¹ but also severely restricted the land and air operations. That night 250 of the Poles were ferried across the river to reinforce the 1st Airborne Division but four days later the town of Arnhem was still in enemy hands and the whole situation had become desperate. It was therefore reluctantly decided to withdraw the gallant Arnhem bridgehead forces. During the night of 25th-26th, with the greatest gallantry and skill, 2,400 men were ferried back across the river in assault boats while detachments of the Dorset Regiment fought valiantly on the north bank to cover the evacuation. There can be little doubt that the whole offensive, which had begun with such promise, would have been completely successful had not bad weather prevented the adequate airborne reinforcement and subsequent relief of the northern spearhead.

Field-Marshal Montgomery considered the operation ninety per cent successful² for it had left the Allies in possession of crossings over four of the five major waterways, including the Maas and Waal, and the Waal bridgehead at Nijmegen was destined to prove a vital factor in the coming battle for the Rhineland. It had failed however to achieve its main strategic objective of establishing a bridgehead across the Rhine and as it seemed likely the enemy would now stabilize his northern front on the Waal and endeavour to hold the Schelde estuary with all the means at his disposal General Eisenhower considered it vital to open up the great port of Antwerp without further delay. To this goal, therefore, the whole energies of the First Canadian Army were directed towards the end of the third week in October.

¹ Even then only two-thirds of the brigade could be dropped.

² Montgomery, *Normandy to the Baltic*, p. 187.

THE EPIC OF WALCHEREN

25. Antwerp and its approaches¹

Antwerp, or Anvers, is the principal port of Belgium and one of the largest in the world. It is situated on the right bank of the Schelde some seventy miles from the entrance to the principal buoyed sea channel of approach, forty-eight miles from Flushing and twelve above the frontier between Belgium and the Netherlands. In peace time it has a large overseas trade as well as a large trade with the interior of the continent both by rail and by inland waterways.

The port is in two separate parts. One comprises the Old River quays and the New River quays extending for three miles up river from the Kattendijk lock; the other of a series of wet and dry docks on the north side of the city. Both parts have all the equipment required in a modern port and are connected with the continental railway system.

In pre-war days at least 11,000 sea-going vessels of an aggregate tonnage of over 24,000,000, and some 44,000 river craft of an aggregate tonnage of over 12,000,000, entered the port annually. This then was the magnificent prize which had fallen so opportunely into the hands of the Allies.

The capture of Antwerp in a virtually undamaged condition represented a great step forward on the road to final victory. Its use would shorten the Allied lines of communication by more than 300 miles but for so long as minesweepers could be prevented from clearing the seventy miles of river and estuary which lay between it and the sea, it remained useless as a supply port and of no immediate value to the Allies. Of this fact the Germans were well aware and were determined to deny the use of the port to the Allies with every possible means at their disposal.

With this end in view they had clung to both banks of the river with the utmost tenacity. At the beginning of October they held strong positions on the south bank in the Breskens area and were even more strongly entrenched on the islands of South Beveland and Walcheren on the north side of the river. The large island of South Beveland¹ is connected to the mainland solely by a narrow causeway which, like the famous Tiber bridge, could be held by a few against the many. Further west lies the heavily fortified island of Walcheren. By 24th October the First Canadian Army had captured Breskens and driven the enemy from the south bank of the river. On the north side all was ready for the opening of the attack on South Beveland and Walcheren which alone remained between the Allies and their goal.

26. The Island of Walcheren¹

The north-western and south-western coasts of Walcheren form the northern shore of the West Schelde approach and estuary. For the protection of the coast—which is skirted by sand dunes—stone dams and wooden groynes have been built out at right angles to the shore. The western end of the island is protected by a large stone dyke about 30 feet high known as the Westkapelsche Dyke.

¹ Plan 4, and Fig. 9, p. 40.

The famous port of Flushing, which has a population of over 20,000, lies to the south-west end of Walcheren. Two miles eastward of Flushing is the entrance to the passage between Walcheren and South Beveland known as the Sloe. This passage mostly dries at low tide but there is a narrow channel between the drying banks, crossed at its northern end by a railway embankment. Middelburg, the principal town in the province of Zeeland, is near the centre of the island.

By 1944 the island itself had been very heavily fortified with nearly thirty batteries mounting guns varying from 3-inch to 9-inch. These defences were designed to cover the entrance to the West Schelde and prevent seaborne landings on the west side of the island. Fourteen of the batteries totalling sixty guns covered the Westkapelle area.¹ The heaviest was W 17, the Domburg battery, of four 8·7-inch guns. The next battery along the coast from Domburg was the Westkapelle battery, W 15, four 5·9-inch guns, situated on the Westkapelsche Dyke half-way between Nooderhoofd and Zuiderhoofd. Then came W 13, between Zuiderhoofd and Zoutelande and W 11, two miles beyond Zoutelande, with six 5·9-inch guns each. A mile inland behind the Dyke and half a mile apart were W 22, four 3-inch guns and W 14, four 4·1-inch guns. Two more batteries, W 12 and W 21, each mounting four 4·1-inch guns, lay one mile apart and parallel to the coast behind Zoutelande. Many of the batteries were housed in concrete emplacements. On the west and south the defences included under-water obstacles and extensive mining of the beaches and their exits. Flushing was covered by a perimeter defence system with a double line of anti-tank ditches. The strength of the island garrison was estimated at nearly 7,000 men but proved to be much greater. Owing to the steep banks and dykes, which intersected the country, airborne attacks were regarded as impracticable. The best plan of attack was to breach the sea walls and flood the enemy artillery positions. Assault craft could then be launched into the island to enable its defences to be taken from the rear. It was, however, only too clear that the capture of the island represented a most formidable task.

Although the Allies were under no illusions regarding the strength of these Walcheren defences and the difficulties of reducing them it was fully appreciated that an all out assault would be the only way to capture the island, silence its batteries and open the coveted way to Antwerp. Thus for the second time in less than 150 years Walcheren became the objective of a British expeditionary force.

27. Capture of Walcheren, 1809

In 1809, during the long reign of King George III, a powerful, but ill-fated, combined expeditionary force had been sent to Walcheren. At the time it was the largest expedition ever sent from the shores of Great Britain and consisted of an army of nearly 40,000 troops and a fleet of more than 250 sail. The strategic aims behind it were perfectly sound. Its object was to take the ports of Flushing and Antwerp, both of which were in the hands of Napoleon, and to assist the Dutch in rising against their French master.

The work of the fleet was carried out with marked efficiency. Walcheren

¹ Plan 5.

was invaded and Flushing captured. Then misunderstandings and disputes between General Lord Chatham, who commanded the invading army, and Admiral Sir Richard Strachan, who commanded the fleet, delayed Chatham's advance so long that the French had time to build up their defences, an unfortunate state of affairs which inspired the following famous lines :

Bold Chatham with his sabre drawn
 Stood waiting for Sir Richard Strachan ;
 Sir Richard, longing to be at 'em,
 Stood waiting for the Earl of Chatham.

Meanwhile the British troops, sleeping in the open, had been attacked by malaria and it was decided to evacuate the island, but before the last troops were taken off early in 1810 4,000 men had died.

28. Capture of South Beveland, 1944

In 1944, unlike 1809, perfect harmony prevailed between the naval and military commanders, for there was complete agreement on the plan of assault and nothing but eagerness to capture the islands of South Beveland and Walcheren and open the way to Antwerp.

The assault opened on 3rd October with a heavy daylight attack on Walcheren by 247 aircraft of Bomber Command. The target was a strip of dyke immediately south of the Zuiderhoofd Light covering an area 330 feet long and 200 feet wide. The aircraft attacked in eight waves between 1300 and 1506, dropping more than 1,000 tons of high explosive bombs, and by 1400 the dyke was breached. Towards the end of the attack the sea was pouring through a gap 100 yards wide. At 1455 eight Lancasters arrived with 12,000 pound bombs but as the sea was already flooding well inland they returned to base taking their bombs with them.

The attack had done little or nothing to impair the island's defences. The great gap, however, opened a way into the island for a landing force which would otherwise have been faced with the suicidal task of making a frontal assault on a great fortified dyke.

Bomber Command renewed the attack on Walcheren four days later when 122 aircraft dropped 730 tons of high explosive bombs on the sea wall east and west of Flushing. To the east the wall was breached in several places and the sea poured steadily inland ; to the west the wall was breached in one place only, but the sea rapidly flooded an area some 500 yards square. During the next three weeks the gaps in the walls were widened by further attacks and the island was gradually flooded so that by the 24th October it resembled a huge soup plate full of water.

The assault plan was for four attacks under the command of Lieut.-General G. G. Simonds, Commander of the First Canadian Army, one by land on South Beveland and Walcheren and three by sea, one on South Beveland and two on Walcheren. The land attack was to be made by the Canadian Army, along the narrow isthmus joining South Beveland to the mainland, across South Beveland, and along the railway embankment between South Beveland and Walcheren. Upon its progress depended the timing of the two seaborne attacks on Walcheren.

The seaborne attack on South Beveland was to be made across the Schelde on the Baarland area. One of the seaborne forces attacking

Walcheren was to cross the Schelde from Breskens and secure Flushing ;¹ the other was to be made by the 41st, 47th and 48th Commandos (Royal Marines) carried from Ostend by Force T, a naval force of 181 landing craft, landing barges and motor launches under the command of Captain A. F. Pugsley, who had rendered such splendid service as Captain (Patrols) off the Normandy beaches,² with Brigadier B. W. Leicester, R.M., as military force commander. It was to attack the Westkapelle area,³ passing into the island through the breach in the sea wall, and then link up with the Flushing force. The Westkapelle attack was to be covered by the Support Squadron and by a special bombarding squadron comprising the battleship *Warspite* and the monitors *Roberts* and *Erebus*.

Early on 24th October the 2nd Canadian Division began its advance westward along the isthmus.⁴ At first progress was slow on account of the extremely difficult nature of the country. Large areas were flooded, particularly in the neighbourhood of the Beveland Canal, and the existing roads were heavily cratered and mined.

In the face of these obstacles the Canadians advanced slowly but steadily, often waist deep in water, and within twenty-four hours had reached a line running north and south of Rilland. Next day they were still some six miles short of the Beveland Canal. Meanwhile, during the night of 25th-26th October, a brigade of the British 52nd Division had left Terneuzen, on the opposite side of the Schelde, in landing craft and had made a double assault in the Baarland area in the south-eastern corner of Beveland. On the westernmost beach the landing was unopposed but to the east the landing craft sustained some casualties from enemy shells. A squadron of D.D. tanks also crossed the river safely but being unable to negotiate the mud flats and dykes could not accompany the infantry inland. In spite of counter-attacks, however, the bridgehead was rapidly extended to Oudelande and beyond.

During 27th and 28th October the leading troops of the 2nd Canadian Division reached the Beveland Canal and found the bridges down ; but that night a crossing was forced and by noon next day a temporary bridge had been opened near Vlakte. Meanwhile the 4th Canadian Armoured Division had taken Bergen-op-Zoom, thus strengthening the base of the South Beveland operation. In spite of all the difficulties the clearing of South Beveland continued rapidly and by the end of October the eastern end of the causeway carrying the road and railway into Walcheren was safely reached. The whole of South Beveland was now in Canadian hands and in order to prevent the enemy from making a stand in North Beveland a column was despatched to clear that island. In the meantime preparations had been going rapidly ahead for the attack on Walcheren.

29. Preparations for the capture of Walcheren

The force of 181 landing craft, landing barges, and motor launches detailed for the assault on the Westkapelle area of Walcheren had assembled with its Supporting Squadron and the frigate *Kingsmill*, as Captain Pugsley's headquarters, at Ostend on 27th and 28th October. Previous

¹ Operation Infatuate I.

² Chapter I.

³ Operation Infatuate II.

⁴ Plan 4.

experience had shown that German shore batteries could rarely resist the temptation of concentrating their fire on any craft attacking them. It was therefore a part of the plan that the Support Squadron, which was still under the command of Commander K. A. Sellar¹ and consisted of twenty-seven landing craft of various types,² should close the shore and deliberately draw the enemy fire upon itself. This would inevitably result in heavy casualties; but as it was hoped that it would enable the assault forces to land with comparative immunity, it was considered that, so long as the enemy made the fatal error of concentrating fire on the Support Squadron, close action was justified and heavy losses acceptable.

Unfortunately, as October drew to an end, the weather prospects for the seaborne assault in the Westkapelle area were far from good. Such was the urgency of opening Antwerp, however, that General Simonds decided to proceed with the Breskens—Flushing attack even if bad weather rendered the Westkapelle assault impossible. As soon as it became clear therefore that the Canadians in South Beveland would reach the Walcheren causeway by the beginning of November he decided to open the Breskens-Flushing assault on 1st November.

Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay, the Allied Naval Commander-in-Chief, who by this time had established his temporary headquarters in the Breskens area, anxiously discussed the weather with General Simonds, for an immediate decision had to be taken whether Force T, Captain Pugsley's force, should be ordered to sail or to remain in harbour at Ostend.

It was a difficult decision to make but Admiral Ramsay had had plenty of previous experience of weather improving suddenly during an operation and, in view of the great advantages to be gained by launching all three assaults simultaneously, ordered the force to sail. At the same time he left to Captain Pugsley the responsibility of deciding, when he reached a position off the Westkapelsche Dyke and could judge the conditions on the spot, whether or not the assault should go in. All was now ready for the attack on Walcheren.

30. Capture of Walcheren

The passage from Ostend was uneventful, and when Force T arrived off Walcheren at 0715 on 1st November it found weather conditions much better than had been anticipated. Captain Pugsley and Brigadier Leicester therefore decided to launch the assault. They were fully aware that all spotting aircraft detailed for the operation were fog-bound in Britain, but considered the advantages to be gained by timing their assault to coincide with the attack on Flushing and the assault on the Beveland-Walcheren causeway, outweighed the disadvantage of having to dispense with air cover. The decision proved to be the correct one, for sea and surf conditions became rapidly worse and had the attack been postponed it could not have been carried out for several days.

As Force T approached Walcheren the 8.7-inch guns of the Domburg battery were firing in the direction of Flushing, clearly indicating that the Allied Breskens-Flushing seaborne assault had already gone in further upstream.

¹ Chapter I.

² Landing Craft, Gun, Support, Flak and Rocket. See p. 51.

That the enemy was fully aware of Force T's approach became evident at 0809 when the Westkapelle Battery W 15, at the centre of the Westkapelsche Dyke, opened a heavy fire on *M.L.902* marking a position BB five miles 270° from the gap in the Dyke. She was the first vessel to come under fire off Westkapelle. At 0848 the Support Squadron deployed into three groups at position BB; one group proceeded to take up a position on the northern flank; another hauled away to the south in order to pass between the 'kidney' shoal and minefield QZX 49 while a third was retained temporarily at BB ready to cover the direct assault on the gap. *M.L.146* was ordered to mark the position of the 'kidney' shoal but came under a heavy cross fire from the Westkapelle and W 13 Batteries.¹ Meanwhile *M.L.902* had courageously remained in her marking position at BB. Observing that the two M.L.s. were being heavily and accurately shelled at short range Commander Sellar ordered them to withdraw and instructed the L.C.G(L)s. to open fire in an endeavour to divert the attention of the enemy batteries to themselves. This had the desired effect but *M.L.146* was twice hit before she could withdraw and suffered some casualties.

The *Warspite* and *Roberts* had also joined in the battle with their 15-inch guns at point blank range. Although the enemy's endeavour to obscure the Westkapelle Lighthouse and other prominent landmarks with a smoke screen was not very successful the absence of spotting fighters very severely reduced the efficiency of the bombardment. This would not have happened had the spotters been able to operate from airfields in Belgium for only the air bases in the United Kingdom were fog-bound. Air Observation Posts had been arranged as a secondary means of observing but had had no opportunity of exercising with the bombarding squadron. This led to considerable confusion for great difficulty was experienced by the bombarding ships in establishing contact with their Air O.Ps. Although the absence of air spotting and presence of smoke greatly reduced the effect of the bombardment, the *Warspite* succeeded in neutralizing the smaller batteries in the Domburg area and temporarily silenced the heavy Domburg battery itself, though it revived quickly after the engagement. It had been arranged that the monitor *Erebus* should attack the Westkapelle battery, W 15, at the centre of the Westkapelsche Dyke, but as her turret was temporarily out of action she ordered the *Roberts* to bombard the battery in her place. After eight salvos the battery ceased fire for a time but at 0910 was again in action and the *Roberts* engaged it for the second time. Ten minutes later the *Erebus*, with her turret repaired, joined in, but the battery rapidly became obscured and was disengaged.

The Support Squadron had also opened fire but though all its craft were being straddled or near-missed by batteries W 11, W 15 and W 17 it was not till 0920 that the first serious hit was registered when *L.C.F.37* was severely damaged forward by an enemy shell and eventually blew up. Shortly after this the southern group also came under heavy and accurate fire south of the 'kidney' shoal, but though severely hit pressed home their attack with unrelenting vigour. At 0934 *L.C.T.(R)334* fired her ranging rocket salvos which fell short. Then she was hit twice on her starboard side forward. By a stroke of ill fortune this caused her to swing towards the north and accidentally let go some of her rockets which fell close to *L.C.H.269*. Unhappily rockets fired by *L.C.T.(R)457* and *L.C.T.(R)378* also fell near three of the supporting craft and on the port beam of the *L.C.I(S)s.* taking the Command ashore. The L.C.Is. at once turned away

¹ Plan 5.

but resumed their course towards the shore at increased speed ten minutes later. Casualties in two of the three supporting craft were thirty slightly wounded but the other, though completely blotted out by the smoke of the exploding rockets, fortunately suffered none. *L.C.T.(R)334* quickly resumed her firing course and with *L.C.T.(R)363* pressed on her attack with the utmost determination although heavily hit.

At 0944 the *Roberts* was ordered to bombard Battery W 13. H-hour, 0945, was now at hand and *L.C.G.(M)101* and *L.C.G.(M)102*, the first two landing craft to go in, were approaching the shore under a hail of fire. They had orders to beach at specified points on the northern and southern shoulders of the gap and to attack pillboxes commanding the approaches of the positions on which *L.C.I.(S)s* and *L.C.T.s* were to unload. Both craft reached their correct positions punctually at H-hour. *L.C.G.(M)102* was soon on fire and was rapidly burnt out. *L.C.G.(M)101* remained beached and firing but was hit repeatedly and when she came out under heavy fire at 1003 it was only to sink by the stern off the beach some minutes later.

Referring to these craft in his Report¹ Commander Sellar says 'theirs was a very gallant action and both . . . were lost . . . due to their being engaged at short range by 4-inch and 6-inch batteries'.

As had been anticipated the enemy batteries were concentrating their fire at short range against the Support Squadron and beaches. When therefore two of the four *L.C.T.s* carrying armoured vehicles specially equipped for moving beach obstacles² approached the shore at 1005 they were driven off by heavy enemy fire. The second pair beached at 1020, followed a few minutes later by one of the first pair. The other, however, was so severely damaged that she was unable to put her vehicles ashore. By this time a group of five *L.C.T.s* had also beached successfully, landed its tanks and retired. The next wave of five *L.C.T.s* beached at 1030, but lost three landing craft, one through damage sustained off the beach and two on mines. An hour later despite heavy and accurate shelling three of the *L.C.T.(R)s* succeeded in firing smoke shells to screen the gap from observation by Domburg but were ordered to withdraw on account of the heavy enemy fire. During the next hour the twelve remaining *L.C.T.s* successfully beached and discharged their loads.

All three Royal Marine Commandos had now landed, one to the north and two to the south of the gap. The process had been slow for only two craft had been able to beach at a time. Once ashore the Commandos came up against tough opposition at nearly all the enemy batteries and strong points but cleared them in succession 'with the utmost resolution'. Equally gallant was the conduct of the naval beach party which worked under heavy attack all day.

All the forenoon the Support Squadron had also been under heavy fire and at 1020 the *Roberts* had again been instructed to attack Battery W 13, this time for a further ten minutes, and at 1045 was told to continue the attack. By 1140 the Commando ashore was closing the battery, which in the meantime had also been engaged by artillery from Breskens, and the *Roberts* was ordered to check her fire. Then, at 1158, *L.C.H.269* urgently requested that W 13 should be bombarded but on account of the proximity of the Allied troops and absence of air observation no action could be taken.

¹ M 013297/44.

² A.V.R.E. : Armoured Vehicle, Royal Engineers. A tank with turret removed and specially equipped for moving obstacles. Manned by Royal Engineers.

In fact, at 1215 the *Roberts* reported that she had not been able to engage the battery since 1020 as the Air O.P. had been forced to leave. At 1242 it was reported that an attack on the battery was being prepared by Allied troops ashore and a few minutes later all craft were ordered to cease firing on it. This was unfortunate for the *Roberts* could have safely bombarded the battery for another hour at least. As it was W 13 was responsible for many casualties in the Support Squadron and was not finally silenced till 1500 that afternoon after an attack by rocket-firing Typhoons. The Air O.P. had proved most disappointing. Two sorties had been flown, the first 'a complete fiasco' and in the second only one aircraft had managed to maintain adequate communication.

All the morning the battle had raged with unabated fury and the craft carrying the Royal Marine Commandos ashore had suffered heavy casualties, fourteen destroyed, eleven by gunfire, three by mines and several more damaged. Their crews, however, had escaped lightly, only five killed and twenty-eight wounded. The Commandos too had suffered only slight casualties while landing, though on shore stiff resistance was met and Allied casualties were extremely heavy. The Support Squadron had also suffered heavily for by 1230 only seven of its twenty-seven craft, including three equipped for firing smoke only, remained completely fit for action.

The Squadron's state was :

SUNK OR SINKING :	<i>L.C.G.(L)s</i> 1 and 2 <i>L.C.F.37</i> <i>L.C.G.(M)s</i> 101 and 102 <i>L.C.S.(L)s</i> 252, 256 and 258
ON FIRE IN THE MAGAZINE AND ABANDONED :	<i>L.C.F.38</i>
DAMAGED AND OUT OF ACTION :	<i>L.C.G.(L)s</i> 11 and 17 <i>L.C.T.(R)s</i> 334 and 363 <i>L.C.Fs.</i> 42 and 36 <i>L.C.S.(L)260</i>
DAMAGED BUT CAPABLE OF FURTHER ACTION :	<i>L.C.G.(L)10</i> <i>L.C.Fs.</i> 35 and 32 <i>L.C.H.98</i>
FIT FOR ACTION :	<i>L.C.G.(L)9</i> <i>L.C.S.(L)s</i> 254 and 259 <i>L.C.T.(R)s</i> 457, 331 and 378 (firing smoke only) <i>L.C.H.269</i>

As was only to be expected, casualties among the officers and men of the Squadron were also extremely heavy, 172 killed and 200 wounded, but their sacrifice had not been in vain for it was under cover of the Squadron that the incoming waves of landing craft had continued to beach so successfully all the morning. There can be no doubt that the Squadron's outstanding gallantry had done much to make the seaborne landing possible

and by 1230 the three Commandos were well established ashore. Captain Pugsley now decided that all craft no longer fit for action should return to Ostend. The Squadron was therefore slowly withdrawn towards the *Kingsmill*, which was anchored in position BB.

Apparently unaffected by the heavy and almost continuous bombardment to which they had been subjected for four hours, enemy Batteries W 11 and W 13 were still most active and while the withdrawal of the Support Squadron was in progress a call for maximum fire support on W 13 was received from the shore. It was clear however that the Squadron could no longer give close support to the advancing Commandos, nor under the prevailing conditions could it fire at W 13 without hitting the marines who had captured enemy strong point W 286 close by. Captain Pugsley therefore directed that the fire support should be given by the heavy bombarding ships and the Commando was informed accordingly.

The *Warspite* could not immediately open fire, however, as the position of the marines ashore was uncertain; and shortly afterwards the request for fire support was cancelled. At 1340 the *Warspite* was in touch with the first spotting aircraft, but at 1510 she attempted to engage the Domburg Battery with Air O.P. During the afternoon the *Erebus* and *Roberts* were also in touch with fighter spotters, enabling them to engage their targets with success until they withdrew to the south at dusk. By this time the Commandos had captured Westkapelle and were advancing towards Domburg and Flushing.

During the night the *Kingsmill* anchored to the north of position BB with the surviving Support Squadron craft forming a thin 'Trout Line' to seaward, while M.T.Bs. patrolled to the south and M.Ls. to the north.

At dusk the *Warspite* had returned to the United Kingdom with her guns nearly worn out but, in view of the heavy casualties in the Support Squadron, the *Erebus* and *Roberts* returned to the scene of action at 0700 next morning. Throughout the day the two monitors carried out a number of successful bombardments before returning to the United Kingdom at 1730.

Meanwhile the Breskens assault force, the 4th Commando (Royal Marines), after successfully crossing the river further up stream under fire early on the morning of 1st November, had landed near Flushing and reached the waterfront without heavy casualties. It was followed by troops of the 152nd Brigade of the British 52nd Division from Breskens and the attack was developed into the town. Next day, after some hard fighting, the lower half of Flushing was in Allied hands. By this time the 41st Commando were in Domburg. The 48th Commando had captured Zouteland, a village between Westkapelle and Flushing, where the 47th Commando took over from them, and on the 3rd they linked up with the Flushing force. This virtually marked the end of the German grip on the Schelde estuary. In the meantime the Canadians had been forced back on the South Beveland-Walcheren causeway six miles north-eastward of Flushing after some initial progress, but after hard fighting troops of the 52nd Division from Terneuzen had crossed the Sloe Channel two miles south of the causeway and secured a bridgehead which was eventually linked with the causeway itself. The reduction of Walcheren had now become a matter of mopping up the many enemy parties marooned in the island, a process during which some 10,000 prisoners were taken. The cost of capturing the island had been high. The defending garrison, which had consisted of German troops from South Beveland and detachments of

the German Fifteenth Army from Calais, had offered the strongest resistance met by the Allies at any coast line during the European operations. Allied casualties, which were almost entirely Canadian and British, numbered 27,633, compared with less than 25,000 in the capture of Sicily, where the Allies had defeated a garrison of 350,000.

So Walcheren fell and the gateway to the Schelde was forced, but the fall of Walcheren did not automatically open the way to Antwerp. The river had been thickly sown with every known type of mine and on 4th November one of the most difficult minesweeping operations of the war was put in hand.

31. Clearing of the Schelde, Operation Calendar¹

The minesweeping operation for the opening of Antwerp was known as Calendar and was in two parts, A and B. Part A was the actual clearing of the Schelde to Antwerp and was under the direction of Captain Hopper, Captain Minesweeping, Sheerness, with the temporary title of Captain Minesweeping Force A. His force comprised the 157th, 165th, 159th flotillas of B.Y.M.S., the 110th, 140th, 102nd, and 139th flotillas of 105 foot M.M.S., the 131st M.S.F. of 105 foot M.M.S. fitted with L.A.A. for fresh water sweeping, the 19th and 15th flotillas of Oropesa fitted motor launches, the 704th flotilla of L.C.P.(L) fitted with snag line sweeps, available ships of the 197th, 198th and 199th Minesweeping Auxiliary Groups of M.F.V. fitted with L.A.A. together with H.M.S. *St. Tudno* as headquarters ship. Part B was the clearing of the Zeebrugge-Ostend channel and was under the direction of the Captain Minesweepers, Harwich, Captain T. W. Marsh, with the temporary title of Captain Minesweeping Force B. His force comprised the 165th M.S. Flotilla and five M.M.S. detached from Force A. Five M.M.S. of the Ostend local forces, under the Commander Minesweeping, Belgium, Commander S. S. Stammwitz, which were to sweep the fresh water section of the Schelde from Walsoorden to Antwerp, also worked under his orders.

So urgently was the opening of Antwerp desired that when a report came in on 1st November that all enemy guns near Knoeke had been taken, Admiral Ramsay decided that the passing of minesweepers up to Breskens was worth the risk. Accordingly orders were sent that the Ostend local defence sweepers should leave Ostend for Breskens but that if engaged by the enemy batteries they were at liberty to return. Consequently when they came under heavy fire from the shore near Zeebrugge next morning they turned back without suffering damage or casualties. Force B, engaged in sweeping the Schelde approach channel near Zeebrugge, also came under heavy fire. Three of its sweepers were hit and the sweep was abandoned for the day after five ground mines had been detonated.

Next day, 3rd November, a combined force of thirteen sweepers—comprising six of the Ostend local force under Commander Stammwitz, and seven detailed for the Breskens-Flushing route—left Ostend in time to pass the batteries on the south shore of the river during the hours of darkness. This time the combined force passed Zeebrugge without trouble. It came under heavy fire off Flushing but reached Breskens safely. All was now ready for Operation Calendar.

¹ Plan 4.

The operation opened on 4th November and during the day the main body of Force A proceeded up the Schelde to Terneuzen opposite South Beveland, where it arrived without trouble after sweeping fifty mines en route. The six sweepers under Commander Stammwitz went on from Breskens to Antwerp where they arrived safely, having detonated five magnetic mines in the Walsoorden Channel and swept the last five miles from Hansveerde. The remaining seven swept a channel three cables wide between Breskens and Flushing and nine ground mines were detonated.

Next day Captain Hopper reported that by the afternoon of the 6th the channel to Flushing might be regarded as a reasonable risk. That day, 6th November, three magnetic mines were detonated at Antwerp. Then came a temporary setback, for on the 7th all sweeping was abandoned owing to heavy weather. Next day, however, it was resumed in the river and another twenty-three mines were destroyed; not, however, without a casualty, for *M.S.M.L.916* was mined and sunk off Walsoorden during these operations. It was fully recognised that the few days saved by the premature acceptance of ships would be far outweighed by any accidental blockage of the narrow parts of the channel and at a conference held that day between Captain Hopper and the N.O.I.C. Antwerp it was agreed that there was no reason to believe that the estimate of twenty-eight days sweeping for the initial clearance of the river could be improved. It was hoped however that Antwerp would be fully open by the 25th, though it might be reasonably safe for small ships to proceed up river at an even earlier date.

Although Force B was kept in harbour at Ostend by heavy weather on 9th November, Force A was able to work in the river. Thirteen ground mines were accounted for in the course of the day's operations, and during the next nine days a further seventy-one mines were destroyed.

In spite of intensive sweeping no further mines were found on the 19th, 20th and 21st, and it was reported that the sweeping of the whole channel had been completed in accordance with the Orders for Operation Calendar. On the 22nd and 23rd, however, another nine mines were swept up and the operation was continued. On the 26th Captain Hopper again reported Operation Calendar completed, and that he considered the risk of odd mines must be accepted. Antwerp was now as safe as intensive minesweeping could make it, though routine sweeping of the Schelde would continue. The first three coasters reached Antwerp that day and the first Liberty ship convoy of nineteen ships, of which sixteen were over 7,000 tons, arrived there safely two days later. That afternoon, the 28th, the Supreme Commander signalled his appreciation of the services of the minesweeping flotillas to the C-in-C, Nore, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Jack Tovey. Operation Calendar had been completed in the face of adverse weather in almost a week less than the estimated time. Two hundred and twenty-nine ground mines and thirty-eight moored mines had been accounted for, a grand total of two hundred and sixty-seven mines.

Thus Antwerp became the principal supply port for the Allied armies in north-west Europe, an historical event the importance of which it would be almost impossible to overestimate.

ON TO TOTAL VICTORY

32. The Long Distance Rocket and Second and Third Flying Bomb campaigns

The opening of Antwerp, with its capacity for handling more than 40,000 tons a day, not only shortened the Allied lines of communication, from Cherbourg, by more than 300 miles but it also allowed the Allies to close some of the Channel ports: thus releasing key personnel and transport resources for the establishment of an advance base in Belgium. Antwerp itself was already out of German gun range and the only anxiety there was due to attacks by enemy *vergeltungswaffen*, or reprisal weapons, which had been developed against the city and port.

Although the clearing of the Pas de Calais had brought the first flying bomb campaign against south-east England to an end early in September, the enemy had by then devised an ingenious method of releasing these weapons from the He.111 bomber aircraft which were operated from Venlo airfield, in Holland. Thus in mid-September the whole of eastern England became a target for these devastating missiles.¹ Meanwhile, south-east England had become the target of a completely new form of V-weapon attack for the enemy had developed a second *vergeltungswaffe*, known as the V.2. This missile took the form of a giant rocket, forty-five feet ten inches in length, weighing thirteen tons with a warhead containing approximately the same weight of high explosive as that of a flying bomb. The new weapon was wingless, travelled distances up to 220 miles, reached a great height, and fell at a speed faster than sound. Thus the first indication of its arrival was the explosion, for the sound of its descent followed several seconds later. The V.2 attack on England, which opened on 7th September, was directed like the first flying bomb campaign mainly against London, but its brunt fell on north and north-west Kent. In mid-October the Germans also began launching large numbers of V-weapons against Antwerp and Brussels, but though the V.2s caused heavy damage in the two cities the Belgians, like the British, faced the attacks unflinchingly.

Attacks on England caused an average of 250 deaths weekly during November, but this figure dropped to 60 when the advance of the British Second Army to the Meuse at the beginning of December eliminated the Meuse bridgehead² and forced the Germans to move their V.1-carrying Heinkel bombers back to the Hamburg-Bremen area. In mid-January bad weather, unserviceable airfields and shortage of petrol grounded the Heinkels and brought the second flying bomb campaign to an abrupt end,³ but the V.2s could still reach London from north-west Holland, and from mid-January to the end of March caused an average of 150 fatal casualties weekly in England alone. By early March the enemy had produced a modified flying bomb with wooden wings and a range increased to 220 miles.⁴ Thus between 2nd and 30th March, London and south-east England once more became V.1 targets and fifty-two flying

¹ Plan 11.

² Section 34 below.

³ The V.1 which landed in the borough of Hornsey, North London, at 0213/14th January 1945 was the last of the air-launched flying bombs.

⁴ Former extreme range 150 miles.

bombs crossed the English coast from north-west Holland during the month.¹

The following figures² illustrate the extent of the three flying bomb campaigns against the United Kingdom.³

PERIOD	ESTIMATED NO. OF BOMBS OPERATED	CROSSED THE ENGLISH COAST	REACHED LONDON AREA	TOTAL DESTROYED	DESTROYED BY H.M. SHIPS
June 13 to Sept. 5 1944	8,081 (from northern France)	5,232	2,340	3,765	20
Sept. 14 to Jan. 14 1945	1,012 (air- launched)	388	66	404	11½
March 2 to 30 1945	158 (from Holland)	52	13	92	1½
Totals	9,251	5,672	2,419	4,261	33

By the end of March, 147 rockets and more than 1,700 flying bombs had come down in Kent alone but welcome relief was at hand, for a rocket which fell at Orpington on 27th March proved to be the last on Great Britain. A few of the wooden wing flying bombs crossed the English coast three days later and with them all V-weapon attacks on the United Kingdom came finally to an end. Meanwhile great progress towards final victory had been made by the Allied armies on the continent of Europe.

33. Brussels Conference, 18th October

After the Battle of Arnhem the situation in Holland had borne striking resemblance to that in Normandy before the break-out at St. Lô, for it was clear that, since the Allies had been unable to retain their bridgehead across the Lower Rhine at Arnhem, the battle for Germany must now be fought west of the Rhine, just as the battle for France had been fought west of the Seine.⁴ This presented a formidable task, for by the middle of October 1944 enemy opposition was stiffening rapidly along the whole front and it was clear that the Germans would oppose the Rhine crossing and defend the Ruhr with all the means at their disposal. Thus the Allies would be obliged to deploy great strength to ensure success and final victory.

At this time the Allied Expeditionary Force was organised into three Army and three Air Groups, all under the supreme command of General

¹ Plan 12.

² Prepared by the Anti-Aircraft Command.

³ W.I.R. 266/11. For total weight of bombs dropped see Appendix D.

⁴ Plan 7 and Fig. 4, p. 24.

Eisenhower. From north to south were: the Twenty-First Army Group under Field-Marshal Montgomery, consisting of the British Second Army and First Canadian Army; the U.S. Twelfth Army Group under General Omar Bradley, consisting of the U.S. Ninth, First and Third Armies; and the Franco-American Sixth Army Group under General Jacob L. Devers, consisting of the French First Army and the U.S. Seventh Army.¹

On 18th October, a few days after the opening of the enemy V.-weapon attacks on Brussels, General Eisenhower held an important conference with Field-Marshal Montgomery and General Bradley in the Belgian capital. The main agreement reached at the meeting was that the British Second Army should launch an attack, from the Nijmegen-Mook area, south-eastwards between the Siegfried Line and the Rhine towards Krefeld, and that the United States Ninth Army should cross the River Roer on a front of twenty-five miles running south-eastwards from Roermond to Julich and attack northwards between the Meuse and the Rhine.² In short, the battle for the Rhineland would consist of two converging offensives: one by the British from the Nijmegen-Mook area south-eastwards, the other by the Americans from the River Roer northwards. At the same time the United States First Army was to advance eastwards from Aachen to the Rhine and gain a bridgehead across the river at Cologne. The basic essential was to deliver these three thrusts in irresistible strength in order to overwhelm the Germans in the northern Rhineland and burst across the Rhine north and south of the Ruhr.

It became rapidly apparent, however, that the Allies were in no position to carry out their plan as speedily as had been hoped. The whole operation depended upon the vital Allied line of communications to Nijmegen and between 22nd and 29th October the XII Corps of the British Second Army carried out a successful attack west of a general line Oss-Veghel-St. Oedenrode in order to widen the Nijmegen salient to the west and capture the Turnhout-Tilburg-Hertogenbosch-Nijmegen road. This attack also formed an important part of the general plan to clear the enemy out of south-west Holland.³

On 31st October General Bradley again discussed the position with Field-Marshal Montgomery and next day General Eisenhower agreed to a revision of the Rhineland plan. The First Canadian Army was to take over the Nijmegen-Mook area as soon as the Schelde operations were completed and the British Second Army was to drive east to the Meuse in order to eliminate the enemy Boxmeer-Maeseyck bridgehead which still threatened the east flank of the Nijmegen salient.

34. Preparations for the Battle of the Rhineland

Exceptionally bad weather throughout November made progress in the flat waterlogged country extremely difficult, and under cover of mist and low cloud the enemy forces both in south-west Holland and in the Meuse bridgehead escaped the inevitable punishment which in more favourable conditions the Allied Air Forces would undoubtedly have inflicted upon them. By 3rd December, however, the Meuse bridgehead had been

¹ Appendix E and Fig. 15 facing p. 66.

² Plan 6.

³ Plans 3 and 4.

eliminated¹ as far south as Roermond but the Germans still clung desperately on to a small triangular salient north of Geilenkirchen stretching along the bank of the river Meuse south-west of Roermond as far west as Maeseyck and back along the Saeffeler Beek, a stiff water obstacle, to the river Roer at Linnich.²

It was only too evident that the enemy would hold grimly on to this bridgehead, for so long as it remained it was clearly unsound for the Americans to launch any attack from the line of the River Roer northwards into the Rhineland. It was hoped however that it would be quickly cleared by the British Second Army but owing to the extensive flooding of the countryside this proved to be impossible. The U.S. Ninth Army therefore took over the responsibility for clearing the salient in order to enable the Second Army to regroup further north in preparation for the Rhineland battle. The target date for the Canadian thrust towards Krefeld was 12th January but advance parties were soon on the move to their concentration areas in the north. This was the situation in mid-December when without warning the enemy launched a strong offensive against the American Twelfth Army Group further south in the Ardennes.

35. Battle of the Ardennes, 16th December 1944–16th January 1945

Immediately after the Battle of Normandy Hitler had faced two major problems; the re-formation of a front and the defence of Germany against invasion.

His defeated Seventh Army, as it fled from the Falaise battlefield, was rated as the equivalent of only twenty-three divisions and he had realised all too well that the creation of an armoured strategic reserve was essential if his forces were not to be completely exhausted before the spring.

Benefiting from the autumn and winter weather, which slowed down operations, the Germans refitted with all the energy at their command and by mid-December had consolidated their new front in the west.³ The strength of their western armies had risen to seventy divisions and it was estimated this figure would increase to ninety by the end of February. Such was the military situation in mid-December when Hitler ordered two of these armies to make a last desperate sally in order to overwhelm the Allies, cross the Meuse, and recapture Antwerp. His plan was for an all-out attack on the U.S. Twelfth Army Group, between Monschau and Echternach in the Ardennes,⁴ by the Sixth S.S. Panzer Army on the right and the Fifth on the left, in order to secure crossings of the Meuse between Liège and Givet and recapture Brussels.

The battle opened on 16th December with the heaviest artillery barrage employed by the enemy during the whole European campaign and, like the Battle of Arnhem, by the dropping of parachute troops along the projected line of advance. The attack which was planned with great care and skill, achieved initial surprise and immediate success. Twenty-eight of the hundred and six American divisions were quickly overrun but



FIG. 11

¹ By the XII Corps of the Second Army. See Plans 3 and 6.

² Fig. 14 facing p. 61.

³ Fig. 11, and Section 24 above.

⁴ Fig. 12.

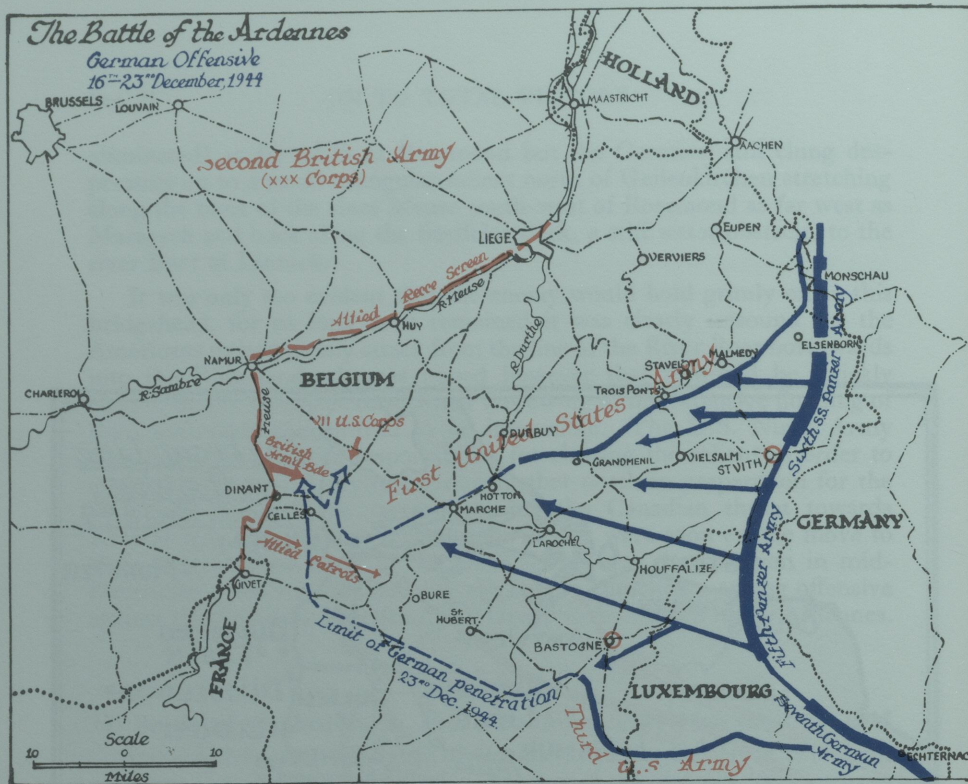


FIG. 12

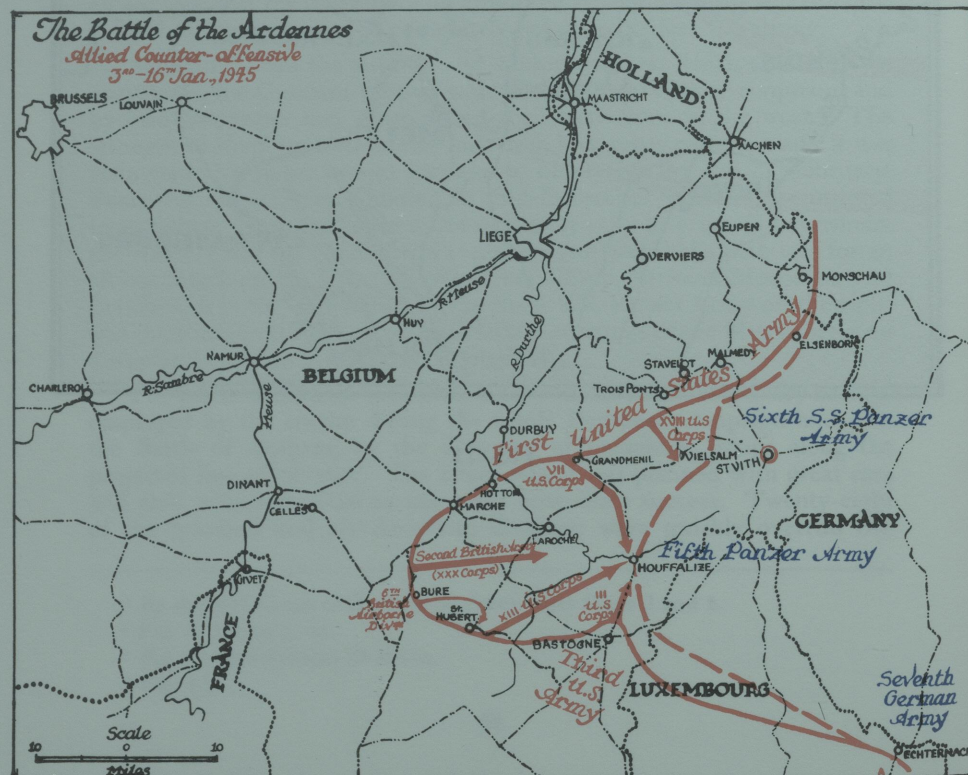


FIG. 13

almost from the first Hitler's plan miscarried; for although the Sixth S.S. Panzer Army rapidly penetrated twenty miles and reached the Stavelot-Trois Ponts-Vielsalm area, it never succeeded in breaking through.

There were, however, signs of an attack developing north of Monschau in the direction of Eupen, Verviers and Liège. Field-Marshal Montgomery therefore brought the concentration for the Rhineland battle to a temporary standstill and stood by to switch the British divisions from the Geilenkirchen sector to the west bank of the Meuse in order to meet any threat to his southern flank. Allied intelligence was extremely vague and on 19th December the Field-Marshal despatched reconnaissance troops to the line of the Meuse and sent strong armoured forces to cover the Meuse bridges between Liège and Givet. Meanwhile the Fifth Panzer Army had by-passed Bastogne in the south and reached the Hotton-Marche-Laroche area. Owing however to the dogged resistance of isolated American groups, particularly at St. Vith and Bastogne, which caused considerable diversion of enemy troops, the German advance was far too slow for any reasonable hope of ultimate success especially as, unlike the British in the Arnhem battle, the enemy had failed to seize crossing places over the river. The enemy forces, however, had succeeded in separating the U.S. First and Third Armies by a gap twenty-five miles wide, between Durbuy and Bastogne, and there appeared to be little to prevent their armoured cars and reconnaissance troops from crossing the Meuse and advancing on Brussels.

In face of this critical situation General Eisenhower transferred the command of the U.S. First and Ninth Armies to Field-Marshal Montgomery, for the enemy penetration had rendered their control from General Bradley's Twelfth Army Group Headquarters in the south extremely difficult.

The Field-Marshal's problem was to halt the enemy, re-establish a firm front between Durbuy and Bastogne and link up with the Third Army. He therefore ordered his armies to thrust as quickly as possible against the shoulder of the enemy salient to the north, while General Bradley's Third Army counter-attacked the enemy in the Bastogne-Luxembourg area in the south.

The enemy advance forces and armoured patrols were already dangerously close to the River Meuse. On 23rd December German tanks were reported twelve miles east of Dinant and that day fighting took place in the Celles area, only four miles from the river. This fortunately proved to be the limit of the German penetration. The weather, which ever since the opening of the battle had favoured the enemy, for thick fog and low cloud had grounded the Allied aircraft, cleared suddenly on Christmas Eve and for the first time the vast weight of the Allied Air Forces could be deployed in checking the advance. They wrought great havoc and, in combination with the fine fighting qualities of the American troops on the ground, quickly turned the tide. By Christmas Day the gap was closed and the enemy offensive sealed off within the general line Eisenborn-Malmedy-Hotton-Marche-St. Hubert-Bastogne. All routes to the Meuse were safely blocked. Next day the United States Third Army attacking from the south relieved the heavily pressed Bastogne garrison, which had made a magnificent stand against almost overwhelming odds, and continued to thrust northwards towards Houffalize.

With the opening of the New Year the German Air Force made a desperate attempt to neutralise the Allied air effort. Deploying the greatest concentration of aircraft it had employed in the whole campaign, it carried out a series of daring low level attacks on the main allied airfields in Belgium and Holland. These raids inflicted heavy losses but were in no way comparable with those suffered by the enemy.

Two days later¹ the Allies opened their counter-offensive with a pincer movement against Houffalize.² The VII Corps of the U.S. First Army launched the attack from the north to meet the Third Army's thrust from the south while the XXX Corps of the British Second Army advanced on Houffalize from the west. The enemy forces were well organised with dug-in tanks and anti-tank guns. The weather was again bad, with visibility less than two hundred yards, but within a few hours advances of two or three thousand yards had been made. Heavy snow then brought progress to a temporary halt but the advance was resumed on the 5th, and two days later the Laroche-Vielsalm road was cut south-east of Grandmenil, severing the main enemy northern supply route. This was a great achievement, for the attack was made in terrible weather against extremely bitter opposition.

All this time the enemy had been making desperate efforts to capture Bastogne and by 6th January no less than ten German divisions were fighting in the Bastogne area. Their repeated failure to take Bastogne was a clear indication that the whole German offensive had failed.

In the north the XVIII Airborne Corps of the U.S. First Army had opened an advance from the Trois Ponts area which by 7th January had reached the outskirts of Vielsalm and was threatening St. Vith and the enemy communications at the base of the salient. On the right of the First Army, the XXX Corps of the British Second Army had attacked on a front of two divisions, and further south the British 6th Airborne Division, which had been hurriedly brought over from the United Kingdom, had overcome fierce opposition in and around Bure before reaching St. Hubert.

Meanwhile the Allied pincer movement had continued towards Houffalize, and Laroche was recaptured by the British on 10th January. The enemy, fighting stubbornly, gave ground slowly but on the 16th, exactly a month after the opening of the battle, the line of the Twelfth Army Group was restored when the U.S. First and Third Armies rejoined hands in the Houffalize area and the dangerous hostile salient was reduced to a harmless bulge. Thus ended the Battle of the Ardennes.

Like the German Seventh Army's abortive attack towards Avranches which had resulted in the Battle of the Falaise pocket,³ the Battle of the Ardennes was a fatal enemy blunder, for it cost the Germans 120,000 men and 600 tanks vitally needed for the defence of the Reich. Great losses, too, had been inflicted on their aircraft which had tried to counter the Allied attacks.

Immediately after the battle General Eisenhower ordered the U.S. First Army to revert to General Bradley's Twelfth Army Group and Field-Marshal Montgomery withdrew the British XXX Corps and the U.S.

¹ On 3rd January.

² Fig. 13.

³ Section 16 above.

Ninth Army with the greatest possible speed in order to regroup in the north for the coming Battle of the Rhineland.

36. Clearing the Roermond triangle, 15th-28th January¹

During the Battle of the Ardennes the Germans had clung tenaciously to their triangular Roer bridgehead north of Geilenkirchen which still barred the way northwards into the Rhineland.² Therefore, as the Allies developed their counter-offensive in the Ardennes, Field-Marshal Montgomery had, once again, turned his attention to the clearing of the triangle and on 10th January had ordered the British Second Army to attack the bridgehead on the 15th.

Punctually on the 15th the British XII Corps opened the preliminary attack towards the village of Susteren and next day the British 7th Armoured Division attacked northwards from the south-western corner of the triangle. On the 18th an assault was launched in the centre sector in order to link up with the armoured columns which were swinging in a right hook to get behind the enemy. By the 20th the high ground at Bocket in the centre of the area was safely in Allied hands and, in spite of heavy counter-attacks, the town of Heinsberg was captured on the 24th. Meanwhile the 102nd Division of the American Ninth Army had quickly cleared the south-eastern corner of the triangle west of Linnich. Thus by the 26th the battle was virtually over. Apart from a very small bridgehead south-west of Roermond the enemy had been forced back across the Roer and by the 28th nearly the whole of the Roermond triangle had been handed over to the American Ninth Army in readiness for the Battle of the Rhineland.

37. Plans for the Battle of the Rhineland

The object of the Battle of the Rhineland was the destruction of all enemy forces between the Rhine and the Meuse. Once the northern Rhineland was in Allied hands it would be possible to cross the Rhine and isolate the Ruhr.

It was, however, essential to strike quickly in order to exploit to the full the German reverses in the Ardennes and at Roermond, but provision of the required degree of strength for the American Ninth Army, which had been temporarily retained in Field-Marshal Montgomery's Command for the coming battle, was bound to take time. Moreover the United States First Army had to gain the Roer dams before the Ninth Army could thrust northwards across the river, since control of the flood waters would enable the enemy to interfere seriously with the Allied operations.

The Field-Marshal therefore pushed ahead with his plans for the south-eastward thrust by the First Canadian Army from the Nijmegen-Mook area, known as Operation Veritable. The concentration of the Canadians was a complicated process, for they totalled just under half a million and had to move into the Nijmegen area through the bottleneck of the Grave and Mook bridges and form up on an extremely limited front. Elaborate arrangements were also necessary to mislead the enemy and comprehensive camouflage schemes were devised.

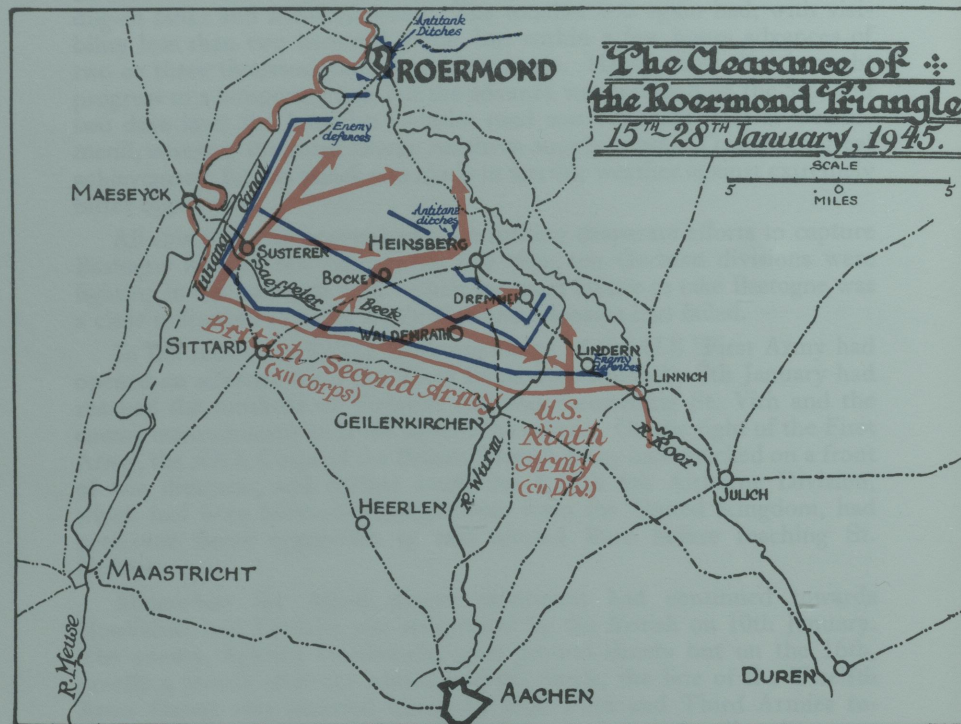


FIG. 14

¹ Fig. 14.

² Section 34 above and Plan 6.

The main features of the battle area south-east of Nijmegen were the Reichswald Forest, and the flooded plains of the River Meuse and undulating and wooded country lying between them. All these were heavily defended. The target date for the opening of the battle was 8th February and Field-Marshal Montgomery suggested to General Eisenhower that the complementary offensive by the Ninth Army should be opened as soon as possible after the launching of the Canadian thrust.

Briefly the task of the First Canadian Army was to launch the attack south-eastwards from the Nijmegen area to the general line Geldern-Xanten. The most suitable places for crossing the Rhine were at Emmerich, Rees, Xanten, and Rheinberg and a firm flank would be established on the Rhine at all four places as the advance proceeded. During the battle the Canadians would retain responsibility for the security of the Nijmegen bridgehead and of the Allied northern flank along the Maas.¹

Meanwhile the British Second Army was to hold a firm front on the Meuse between Boxmeer and Roermond and assist the Canadians in all possible ways. It was also to cross the river and secure Venlo but subsequently, as Venlo was taken by the Americans, this proved to be unnecessary.

The U.S. Ninth Army was to launch its offensive, which was known as Operation Grenade, northwards from the Roermond-Linnich area towards the Rhine between Dusseldorf and Wesel as soon as possible after 8th February.

Extensive air operations were undertaken during the night of the 7th against railway bridges and ferries serving the enemy in the battle area. Heavy air raids were also made on Cleve and Goch and on the main communication centres in the enemy rear. All was now ready and the battle opened punctually during the early hours of 8th February.

38. Battle of the Rhineland, First Phase, 8th-13th February

The British advance was timed to start at 1030 and fire was opened on the enemy defences promptly at 0500. For five hours the British guns pounded the enemy positions and then, at 1000, opened up the barrage proper. When the infantry went forward at 1030 they found that the counter-battery fire had largely neutralised the German artillery. Enemy opposition was stiffest in the right sector against the 51st Division, which had advanced from Mook² with orders to capture the high ground at the south-west corner of the Reichswald Forest. In the centre the 53rd Division quickly secured the high ground at the north-west corner of the Forest. Many mines were exploded but the Churchill tanks and bridge-layers kept up with the infantry though the flame throwers and flails were soon bogged down. By 1700 the 15th Division had captured the village of Kranenburg and an hour later the 3rd Canadian Division, which had advanced from Nijmegen and attacked across the floods north of the Nijmegen-Kranenburg road in buffaloes, were in Zyfflich and Zandpol. By midnight all immediate objectives had been attained and over eleven hundred prisoners taken. The German 84th Division had been severely mauled but fortunately British casualties were light. Further south air reconnaissance

¹ Plan 4.

² Plan 6.

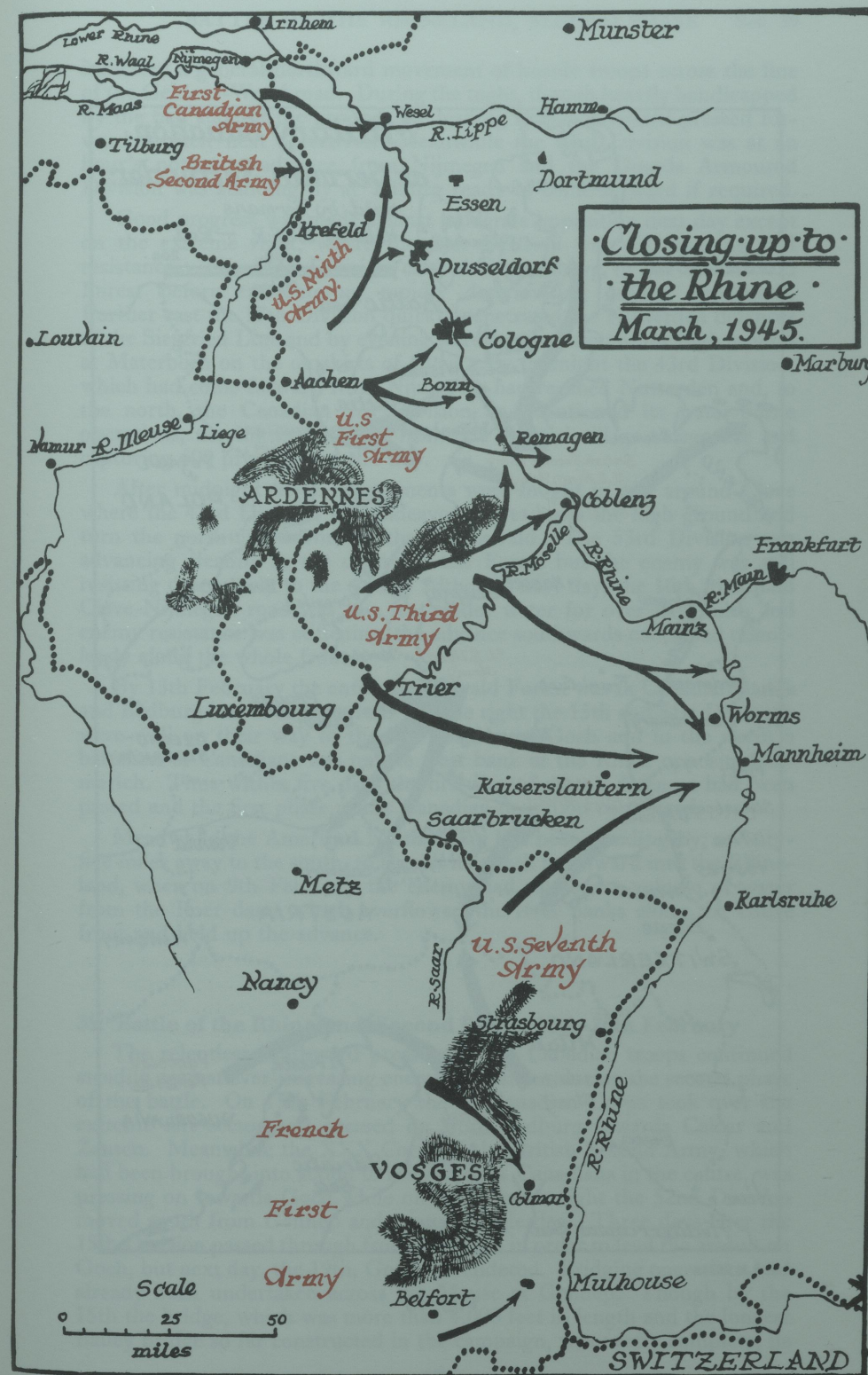
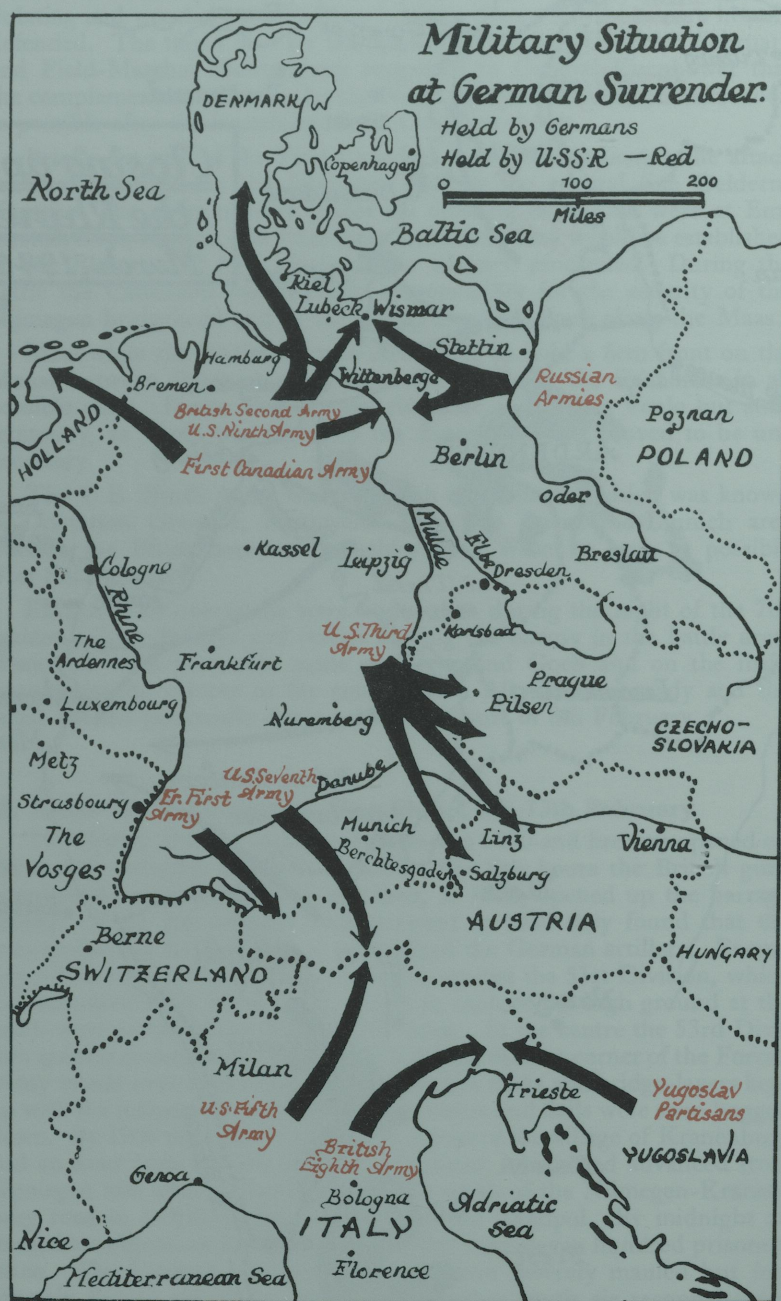


FIG. 15



C. B. H. 20360

FIG. 16

indicated a general northward movement of hostile troops across the line of the Geldern-Wesel road. During the night, though heavily handicapped by the bad state of the ground, the leading British divisions pressed forward to their next objectives. Meanwhile the 43rd Division was at an hour's notice to advance from Nijmegen and the Guards Armoured Division was standing by at Tilburg ready to come forward if required.

Good progress was made against moderate opposition next day except on the extreme right, where the 51st Division was still meeting stiff resistance. The 53rd Division cleared Stuppelburg in the Reichswald Forest before encountering rapidly deteriorating ground conditions. Further east the 15th Division quickly penetrated the Nutterden defences of the Siegfried Line and by evening were in possession of the high ground at Materborn on the outskirts of Cleve. By midnight the 43rd Division, which had come forward from Nijmegen, had reached Nutterden and, to the north, the Canadian 3rd Division had continued its water-borne operations, moving in buffaloes from one isolated village to another and capturing 600 prisoners on the way.

After midnight fierce engagements were fought in and around Cleve where the 43rd Division was endeavouring to cross the high ground and turn the north-east corner of the Reichswald. The 53rd Division was advancing steadily in the centre of the Forest but the enemy was still resisting desperately to the south. Although next day, the 10th, the main Cleve-Nijmegen road was two feet under water for over five miles and enemy resistance was stiffening, the advance southwards continued relentlessly along the whole front.

By 13th February the entire Reichswald Forest was in Canadian hands and Bedburg had been captured. On the right the 15th and 51st Divisions were well on their way to the key position of Goch and in the north a battalion of Canadians was on the west bank of the Rhine opposite Emmerich. Thus within five days the first line of enemy defences had been passed and the first phase of the Canadian operation completed.

Meanwhile the American Ninth Army had been standing-by, seventy-five miles away to the south, to launch its attack northward into the Rhineland, when on 9th February the enemy had released a volume of water from the Roer dams which overflowed the river banks along the entire front and held up the advance.

39. Battle of the Rhineland, Second Phase, 13th–20th February

The relentless southward pressure of the Canadian troops continued steadily against ever-increasing enemy opposition during the second phase of the battle. On 15th February the II Canadian Corps took over the extreme left sector and pressed on from Bedburg towards Calcar and Zanten. Meanwhile the XXX Corps of the British Second Army, which had been brought into action to reinforce the Canadians in the centre, was pressing on towards Goch while on the extreme right the 52nd Division moved south from Gennep and captured Afferden. Three days later the 15th Division passed through from the north in order to lead the assault on Goch, but next day, the 19th, Goch surrendered. Bridging operations had already been undertaken across the Meuse at Gennep. Though by the 15th the bridge, which was more than 4,000 feet in length and the longest Bailey bridge so far constructed in the campaign, was nearly complete, its

approaches were under two feet of water and it was not till the 20th that it was finally opened to traffic.

With the fall of Goch the Canadians had penetrated two of the main defence belts organised by the Germans between the two rivers. It only remained to break through the last defensive system, the Hochwald 'lay-back' running six miles east of the Siegfried Line along the high ground from Rees through Geldern to the Roer at Linnich. The XXX Corps was therefore directed from the Goch area to Geldern, and the II Canadian Corps was ordered to deliver the main attack in the general area between Udem and Calcar through the Hochwald Forest to Xanten. Thus ended the second phase of the battle. Meanwhile the advance of the U.S. Ninth Army was still held up by the flood waters of the River Roer sixty miles away to the south.

40. Battle of the Rhineland : southern attack, 23rd February-5th March¹

The enforced postponement of the U.S. Ninth Army's attack enabled the Germans to concentrate all their available reserves against the Canadians. This was not altogether a disadvantage for though the Canadian advance was slowed down it was clear that American progress would be rapid when at length the southern assault could be launched.

The Ninth Army attack eventually opened on 23rd February, and at 0330 that morning the Americans streamed across the Roer between Linnich and Julich with the XIX Corps on the right and the XIII on the left.

Within twelve hours sixteen battalions were across the river, Julich was clear of the enemy, and eight miles of the Dusseldorf road was in American hands. American casualties were light and 700 prisoners had been taken.

In fine weather and over rapidly drying ground the Americans continued to make rapid progress. By 26th February their bridgehead across the Roer was twenty miles wide and ten deep. The advance from the bridgehead was quickly developed in two main thrusts, one by the XIX Corps on Neuss, the other by the XIII Corps on Dülken and Viersen. On 1st March the XIX Corps captured Muchen-Gladbach and pushed rapidly towards Neuss. That day the XVI Corps, which had joined the advance, entered Roermond and Venlo. On 2nd March Neuss was cleared and the XIX Corps reached the Rhine in two places. Meanwhile the XIII Corps had captured Krefeld. Next day the British and the XVI U.S. Corps linked up in the northern outskirts of Geldern and the battle for the Rhineland had reached its final stage. By 5th March the whole of the west bank of the Rhine from Neuss to Nijmegen was in Allied hands.

In fighting a battle west of the Rhine the Germans had committed yet another major strategical blunder, just as they had previously committed fatal errors in fighting battles west of the Seine and in the Ardennes. Their only sound course, after the Battle of the Ardennes, had been to withdraw across the Rhine where they could have offered strong resistance. After their heavy losses in the Ardennes and Rhineland they were no longer in a position even to delay the Allied forces seriously once they had crossed the river. Meanwhile they had also committed a grave tactical blunder on

¹ Plan 6.

the U.S. First Army front further south, one which was destined to play no small part in bringing about their early defeat, and hostilities quickly to an end.

41. The Ludendorff Bridge

The retention of the U.S. Ninth Army by Field Marshal Montgomery's Command during the Battle of the Rhineland had left General Bradley's Twenty-first Army Group with only two armies, the First on the left, between Aachen and the Roer, and the Third on the right, south of the Ardennes.¹ The opening of the Ninth Army assault across the Roer on 23rd February was a signal to General Bradley to open a series of attacks towards the Rhine and that day the VII Corps of the First Army crossed the Roer at Duren. By 5th March it was in the outskirts of Cologne and two days later the whole city was in American hands. That day the III Corps reached the Rhine at Remagen, thirty miles south of Cologne. Here it encountered one of those rare strokes of fortune which when quickly exploited during war produce almost incalculable results.

In March 1945 the Rhine was crossed at Remagen by the Ludendorff Bridge, a double track steel span structure, which was over 1,300 feet long and had been constructed for military purposes during the 1914-18 War. The enemy had, of course, made elaborate preparations to destroy all the twenty-six Rhine bridges. To this the Ludendorff Bridge was no exception, but its defenders were taken almost completely by surprise. As the Americans rushed the bridge one small charge exploded beneath it, but the bridge, though damaged, was saved from immediate destruction. This was a triumph of the first magnitude. The Americans were across the Rhine on a permanent bridge and at last final victory appeared to be 'just round the corner.'²

This fatal enemy blunder was entirely unforeseen by the Americans but, on General Eisenhower's orders, they at once concentrated five divisions in the new bridgehead which by 9th March was more than three miles deep and strong enough to defy all enemy attempts to destroy it. The enemy however made desperate efforts with long range artillery and air attack to destroy the bridge itself. For a time neither form of attack was successful and the American troops continued to pour across the river.

Gradually, however, the accumulated effects of the enemy attacks weakened the bridge and after 12th March the Americans wisely ceased using it, for Treadway bridges, fully capable of sustaining the troops in the bridgehead, were already in use. On 17th March, in spite of all the efforts of the American engineers, the centre span of the Ludendorff Bridge collapsed, but, from the enemy point of view, it was too late, for the bridge had fully served the Allied purpose.

The importance of the Remagen bridgehead can hardly be overestimated, for the Germans were forced to concentrate several of their surviving formations against it with the consequent weakening of their defences elsewhere. Thus the diversion of five American divisions to seize the bridgehead did nothing to modify or interfere with the Allied plan for destroying the German armies at the centre of the front line north and south of the River Moselle. By 15th March General Bradley's other

¹ Fig. 15 facing p. 66.

² Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, p. 415.

Army, the United States Third, had reached the Rhine twenty miles south of Remagen and had established a bridgehead over the Moselle south-west of Coblenz. That day the Americans advanced south-eastwards from the new bridgehead and eastwards from Trier while further south the U.S. Seventh Army attacked north-eastwards between the Rhine and Saarbrücken. At the same time the French First Army successfully closed up to the Rhine east of the Vosges, near the Swiss frontier. All these attacks were successful and by the third week in March the allied armies had closed the Rhine throughout its entire length from Nijmegen to Switzerland.¹ All was now ready for the Battle of the Rhine which was destined to carry the Allied armies across the river and thence right into the very heart of Germany in order to bring the war in Europe to a triumphal end.

42. Plans and preparations for the Battle of the Rhine²

The immediate object of the Battle of the Rhine was the establishment of a substantial bridgehead north of the Ruhr from which the British Twenty-first Army Group and U.S. Ninth Army could break out, isolate the Ruhr and overwhelm the enemy in north Germany.

Briefly the plan of battle consisted of the crossing of the Rhine on a front of forty-five miles between Osroy and Rees, with the U.S. Ninth Army on the right and the British Second on the left. The dividing line between the two armies was to be the river Lippe. The Ninth Army was to cross the Rhine south of Wesel and secure the right flank of the battle while the Second was to cross the river north of the Lippe between Wesel and Rees. It was to capture Wesel and expand the initial bridgehead to a width of sixty miles from Dorsten to Pannerden on the general line Wesel-Dorsten-Aalten-Pannerden in order to make it wide and deep enough to allow for the forming up of sufficient forces for a drive east and north-west into Germany and Holland. The main bridging centres were to be at Wesel, Xanten and Rees but the Canadian II Corps, after passing over the Rees bridges, was to extend the bridgehead north-westward towards Emmerich, where the bridging was to be the responsibility of the First Canadian Army. British and U.S. airborne troops were to be dropped across the river opposite Xanten immediately north of Wesel but only *after* the assault over the river had been made, since it was undesirable to drop parachute troops during the hours of darkness, especially as the presence of airborne troops in the target area would make full use of artillery impossible.

The enemy forces facing the Second Army immediately over the river were provided largely by the German Army Group 'H', while the German Twenty-fifth Army was disposed across north-west Holland to the sea. Four enemy infantry divisions faced the U.S. Ninth Army between Cologne and Essen, but apart from anti-tank ditches at Wesel and Rees the enemy defences had little depth and consisted mainly of hastily prepared earthworks. On 23rd March an important change took place in the enemy command when Field-Marshal Kesselring relieved Field-Marshal von Runstedt as German Commander-in-Chief in the West.

Meanwhile the British Second Army had been bridging the Meuse at Gennepe, Well, Lottum and Venlo, between Grave and Roermond, in

¹ Fig. 15.

² Plan 7.

order to open up the roadhead between the Meuse and the Rhine. So enormous was the amount of material required for the coming Rhine battle that by the 23rd March the roadhead had received no less than 120,000 tons of stores and ammunition, 600 tanks, 4,000 tank transporters and 32,000 wheeled vehicles.

The actual crossing of the Rhine, in the face of even light enemy resistance, presented a formidable task, for its width on the forty-five mile wide battle front was between four and five hundred yards and its flow some three and a half knots. Its bed of sand and gravel however was expected to give a good bearing surface for amphibious tanks. By the middle of March the floods which had been such a severe handicap during the Battle of the Rhineland were subsiding rapidly and the ground was drying remarkably quickly. A week later all available amphibious vehicles and several flotillas of naval landing craft,¹ had been transported across Belgium and southern Holland and collected in the roadhead immediately behind the battle area. The weather was favourable and on the afternoon of the 23rd, just as Kesselring was taking over his new command, orders went out from Field-Marshal Montgomery for the launching of the attack.

43. Battle of the Rhine, 23rd-28th March²

The devastating Allied artillery barrage, which opened the battle, reached its climax at 2100³ just as the assault waves of the 51st Division successfully crossed the river in the neighbourhood of Rees. At first their amphibious craft met little resistance, for the enemy forces were thinly disposed on the eastern bank and the overwhelming British barrage had completely neutralised the German guns. Before long, however, enemy paratroops arrived in the Rees sector and the British advance was slowed down while alternatives for bridging and ferrying were sought.

An hour later, at 2200, the British 1st Commando Brigade crossed the river, without serious opposition, west of Wesel, and then waited fifteen minutes while Lancasters of Bomber Command dropped a thousand tons of explosives on the enemy defences only fifteen hundred yards ahead. Immediately the bombing ceased the brigade went forward and by 0300 was in the outskirts of the town. By this time the 15th Division had made a successful crossing, in the face of only light opposition, near Xanten five miles further west. Follow-up formations were soon pouring across the river in newly established ferries and pushing rapidly ahead. Meanwhile the airborne forces were preparing to take off⁴ and during the morning of the 24th two mighty air fleets with their escort of fighters converged near Brussels on their way to the Rhine. The first parachutists landed at 1000 and for the next three hours over seventeen hundred aircraft and thirteen hundred gliders dropped fourteen thousand troops into the battle area opposite Xanten,² while nine hundred fighters maintained an air umbrella overhead and fighter squadrons flew deep into Germany in order to keep enemy aircraft out of the battle zone.

¹ Section 44 below.

² Plan 7.

³ 23rd March.

⁴ The Americans from bases in France, and the British from bases in England.

This was a wonderful and inspiring demonstration of Allied air power for by the end of the day the British and American paratroops had captured all their immediate objectives and taken more than 3,500 prisoners. They had also thrown the enemy into great confusion and had materially assisted the advance of the Allied assault divisions. In the Ninth Army sector the American advance had reached the general line of the Dinslaken-Wesel road. On the Second Army front the 1st Commando Brigade had occupied Wesel and the 15th Division had established a bridgehead seven miles wide and three deep further down-stream opposite Xanten. Only at Rees, where the bridgehead was four miles wide and two deep, had progress been slow. Thus twenty-four hours after the opening of the battle the Allied forces had firmly established themselves on the east bank of the river¹ and were ready to enlarge the bridgehead for the final breakout into north Germany.

The allied positions were further strengthened during the night of 24th-25th March and a heavy enemy counter-attack against the airborne troops was successfully repulsed north of Wesel. Steady progress was maintained throughout the 25th. That day the Americans completed the clearance of Dinslaken and linked up with the British 1st Commando Brigade south of Wesel. The 15th Division made steady progress on the XII Corps front of the British Second Army throughout the day and further north Rees was virtually cleared by the 51st Division. Next day the XVI American Corps advanced over six miles towards Dorsten and Gladbach and captured Bruckhausen. The airborne divisions also advanced steadily throughout the day and on their left the 52nd Division captured Ringenberg.

During the day the bridgeheads of the 15th and 51st Divisions became securely linked and on the extreme left flank the 3rd Canadian and 43rd Divisions seized Hueth and Millingen.

The U.S. 79th Division captured Halten and reached the Dortmund-Ems Canal on the extreme right flank early on 27th March while the airborne divisions made good progress in the centre north of the Lippe, and Bocholt was captured on the Second Army front. Except in areas held by enemy paratroops opposition had almost completely disappeared; the Americans took Gladbach and Gahlen on the 28th and that day reached Dorsten and Haltern while, on the extreme left flank, the Canadians closed in on Emmerich.

At long last the allies possessed an adequate springboard from which to launch a mortal thrust into the very heart of Germany. Meanwhile the mighty Russian Army was pressing in from the east to complete the opposing jaw of the great pincer movement which had started at Stalingrad and El Alamein in the autumn of 1942 and was destined to bring the once arrogant and invincible Reich to the galling bitterness of utter defeat.²

44. The Navy's part in the Rhine operations³

The Navy had played an important and useful part in the Rhine operations for, at the request of the Twenty-first Army Group, the Admiralty had issued instructions during February for the creation of a special

¹ Plan 7, shaded areas.

² Plan 7.

³ M 05785/45.

Rhine force, known as Force U. The new force, which was commanded by Captain P. H. G. James, R.N., and consisted of thirty-six L.C.V(P)s.¹ and thirty-six 50-foot L.C.Ms.,² had assembled at Antwerp early in March but by the 20th had been transferred overland to Nijmegen.

It had been intended that Force U should ferry troops and vehicles across the Rhine during the actual military assault, but from the naval point of view the most conspicuous feature about the operation was that it assumed a totally different aspect from anything anticipated. Force U in fact took no actual part in the assault, for by 1530 on 24th March, when the first landing craft was launched, the Army held substantial bridgeheads on the east bank of the river and with the exception of sporadic sniping the naval parties encountered little enemy opposition. Three of the first six craft launched in the Xanten sector patrolled the river during the evening of the 24th while the remainder assisted with the erection of a temporary bridge³ a short distance below the town. Thus for a time this L.C.V.(P) Flotilla became virtually a section of the Royal Engineers. By the afternoon of the 25th the number of landing craft operating in the Xanten area had risen to fourteen. They were the only craft actually at work on the river during the whole of the Battle of the Rhine. The remaining L.C.V(P)s., however, rendered excellent service during the follow-up period, towing heavy pontoons and protecting bridges at Rees and Emmerich. The L.C.Ms., on the other hand, were hardly used at all by the Second Army, but played a useful part in the capture of Arnhem, on 13th April, by carrying the assault troops of the I Canadian Corps across the Lower Rhine from the Nijmegen bridgehead. Throughout the whole of the Rhine operations all the landing craft proved eminently suitable for the tasks allotted to them for they gave no trouble and were in every way highly satisfactory.

The most important naval lesson learnt, confirmed later during the operations on the River Elbe, was the necessity for naval units thus engaged to be fully mobile and self-supporting. Admiral Sir Harold Burrough, who had become A.N.C.X.F. after the tragic death of Admiral Ramsay in an aircraft crash on 2nd January, considered Force U carried out all its tasks in an admirable fashion and rendered invaluable assistance in the crossing of the river.⁴ On 29th March he signalled: "The Supreme Commander has thanked me for the good work that is being done by the Allied Navy on the Rhine. Please convey to the officers and men concerned my high appreciation of their fine efforts, and the great contribution they are making towards final victory."⁵

45. Advance to the Elbe, April

When the Allies broke out of the Duisburg-Emmerich bridgehead at the beginning of April, the American advance was characterised by great

¹ Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel.

² Landing Craft Mechanised, Mark 3.

³ Known as the Sussex bridge.

⁴ M 05785/45.

⁵ 'Some remarkable engineering feats were accomplished in working ferries and bridging the river, and it is interesting to note that the Royal Navy was well to the fore with craft which had been dragged by road all across Belgium, Southern Holland and the Rhineland.'—Field-Marshal Montgomery, lecture on the Campaign in N.W. Europe, Royal United Service Institution, October 1945.

dash and speed in the face of only scattered and ineffective enemy resistance. Its object was the establishment of the U.S. Ninth Army on the River Elbe from Magdeburg to Wittenberge.¹ By 3rd April the XIII Corps had reached the line of the Weser beyond Herford and the U.S. First Army, which had pushed northwards from the Remagen bridgehead, had linked up with the XIX Corps near Lippstadt, thus completing the encirclement of the Ruhr. Meanwhile the U.S. XVI Corps had forced its way southwards into the built-up area of the Ruhr valley where, with the First Army, it completed the reduction of the enemy trapped in the Ruhr pocket.

The main British Second Army advances from the bridgehead were made by the XII Corps in the centre with the VIII Corps on the right and the XXX Corps on the left. Enemy resistance was lightest in front of the VIII Corps, which advanced rapidly to the Dortmund-Ems Canal. Osnabrück was quickly cleared and by 5th April Minden and Stolzenau were taken. Three days later Celle had been captured and bridgeheads established over the Aller. Stiffer resistance was encountered across the Aller but on the 18th Uelzen and Lüneburg fell after four days hard fighting, and next day the Elbe was reached near Lauenburg. By 24th April the west bank of the river had been cleared of the enemy throughout the Corps' entire sector.

The XII Corps had also experienced little difficulty in advancing from the Rhine bridgehead, but encountered stiff resistance on the line of the Dortmund-Ems Canal. Rheine and its airfields, however, were captured by 6th April and the advance was pushed on across the Weser and Aller. Soltau was captured on the 18th and the outskirts of Harburg, which lies on the Elbe opposite Hamburg, were entered on the 23rd.

The XXX Corps also overcame stout resistance along the line of the Ems and by 19th April was within two miles of Bremen but it was not till the 26th that the last pockets of resistance had been mopped up there. With Bremen reduced the Corps continued its advance beyond the Weser and quickly reached the Elbe estuary below Hamburg. Meanwhile the First Canadian Army had captured north-east Holland and most of northern Germany between the Ems and the Weser, while the Allied armies from the Vosges and from Northern Italy had by-passed Switzerland, and the U.S. Third Army after penetrating deep into the Reich from the area of the Ardennes was advancing towards Pilsen, Linz and Berchtesgaden.²

46. Allies reach the Baltic, 1st May³

Although the Allies were not in great strength in the wide Twenty-First Army Group sector east of the Rhine it was part of General Eisenhower's plan to advance rapidly to the Baltic, in order to cut off Schleswig-Holstein and Denmark and seize the Kiel Canal and north-west German ports.

The plan was for the VIII Corps to establish a bridgehead fifteen miles wide and eight deep across the Elbe in the Lauenburg area. It would then develop a strong thrust northwards and capture Lubeck while the XII

¹ Plan 8.

² Fig. 16 facing p. 67.

³ Plans 8 and 9 and Fig. 16.

Corps turned west and captured Hamburg, the last remaining enemy submarine base.

The VIII Corps attack was successfully launched during the early hours of 29th April. The one time all-powerful German Army was fast approaching disintegration and though eight or nine enemy battalions still faced the Second Army on the far bank of the Elbe, the leading British assault troops crossed the river, which in the area of Lauenburg is between 300 and 400 yards wide, without loss. The bridgehead was secured during the day and 1,300 prisoners were captured while the Royal Air Force provided maximum cover, which included a number of the new jet-propelled fighters, and shot down thirteen enemy aircraft.

On 30th April the U.S. XVIII Corps crossed the river astride Bleckede further upstream and rapid progress was made by the Allies next day when the 6th Airborne Division advanced forty miles to the Baltic and reached Wismar without opposition while the XII Corps moved westward against Hamburg which, after surrendering unconditionally, was occupied on 3rd May, bringing to an end the once grave German submarine menace.

Meanwhile Russian forces had linked up with the western Allies on the Wismar-Wittenberg line and at last the jaws of the great Allied pincers were firmly closed. The country north of the Elbe was now packed with German refugees, Berlin was in flames and with the northern flank of the Red Army sweeping in from the east all German resistance collapsed. Nothing more remained to the enemy save total surrender.

47. Total victory

Enemy resistance had in fact been on the very verge of total collapse ever since the Allied armies had crossed the Rhine and though Hitler and some of his commanders refused to contemplate surrender, behind the scenes in Germany ways were being anxiously sought to bring hostilities in the west to a speedy end. Some of the enemy commanders hoped in this way to end the two-front war in order to concentrate their remaining strength against the victorious Russian armies in the east. Naturally their tentative proposals for a unilateral peace, which were made to the British Embassy in Stockholm, were rejected out of hand.

On 1st May, two days after the western Allies had stormed across the Elbe, Hamburg radio announced that Hitler, after appointing Grand-Admiral Karl Dönitz, the German Naval Commander-in-Chief, as his successor, had fallen 'at his post in the Reich Chancellery, fighting to the last breath against Bolshevism and for Germany'. Dönitz then came to the microphone and declared that Germany would fight on.

Next day Marshal Stalin announced that Berlin had fallen and on the 3rd a Soviet communique stated that according to a German propagandist, Hitler, Goebels and the newly-appointed Chief of the General Staff, General Krebs, had all committed suicide in the capital.

Meanwhile Dönitz, after endeavouring to seize power in Schleswig-Holstein and finding the situation beyond control, had become anxious to end the war. He was not prepared however to capitulate to Russia and ordered the German armies retreating from the eastern front to surrender to the Anglo-Americans.

German anxiety to surrender to the western Allies increased rapidly as the situation in the ever narrowing belt between the eastern and western Allied armies grew more and more confused. On 3rd May a strong team led by Dönitz's emissary, General-Admiral von Friedeberg, visited Field-Marshal Montgomery on Luneburg Heath and informed him that the German High Command wished to surrender their armies in the northern sectors, including those retreating through Mecklenberg before the Russian advance. The Field-Marshal replied that the capitulation of German forces on the eastern front must be negotiated with the Russians. He would therefore discuss only the unconditional surrender of forces still resisting the western allies in Holland, the Frisian Islands, Heligoland, Schleswig-Holstein, Denmark, and in the areas still held by the Germans west of the Elbe. Von Friedeberg explained that the delegation had no power to accept but agreed to recommend acceptance to Field-Marshal Keitel.

On the evening of 4th May von Friedeberg returned with further instructions from Keitel and Dönitz but Field-Marshal Montgomery informed him bluntly that he was only interested to hear whether the answer was 'yes' or 'no'. On learning that the answer was in the affirmative he agreed to accept capitulation and within twenty minutes the Instrument of Surrender was signed.¹

Its terms were uncompromising. Hostilities against the western Allies were to cease on land, sea, and in the air at 0800 on 5th May and the German Command was to carry out all further orders issued by the Allied Powers on any subject without argument or comment. Disobedience would be regarded as a breach of the terms and dealt with accordingly. If any doubt or confusion arose regarding the meaning or interpretation of the terms the final decision would lie with the Allies.

The end was at hand. In Italy the enemy had already abandoned the struggle and in southern Germany and Austria the German First and Nineteenth Armies had surrendered unconditionally to the Allied Sixth Army Group.

Meanwhile von Friedeberg had reported to General Eisenhower at Reims. To the last the Germans attempted to gain time in order to withdraw their troops from the eastern front and surrender them to the western Allies, but the Supreme Commander took firm measures to check any delay. Only two days later an Instrument of General Surrender was signed at Reims by Colonel-General Jodl. It took effect at midnight on the 8th and next day Field-Marshal Keitel signed the formal ratification of surrender in Berlin.

Thus Great Britain who five years earlier, when apparently faced with certain and total defeat, had stood alone in defiance of the whole might of the Third Reich, came at last, with her new and gallant Allies, to total victory. For :

'Come the three corners of the world in arms,
And we shall shock them. Nought shall make us rue,
If England to itself do rest but true.'

¹ At 1820 4th May.

APPENDIX A

'TROUT LINE'
NIGHT 2nd-3rd AUGUST 1944

		49.....	H.D.M.L.1412	
		B8.....	L.C.F.34	
		C7.....	H.D.M.L.1049	
		D6.....	L.C.F.1	
M.Ls.	M.L.147		L.C.F.21	
North to South			L.C.G.1	
A9 - C7			L.C.F.38	
C7 - E5			L.C.F.33	
E5 - M5	M.L.146		L.C.G.764	
	M.L.198		L.C.F.36	
			L.C.G.939	
			L.C.F.20	
			L.C.F.19	
			L.C.F.25	
			L.C.S.(L) 256	
			260	
			259	
			255	

1. Craft are to leave anchorage so as to be in position before dusk.
2. REPORTS of events are of paramount importance, and are to be sent in as soon as possible, in any case before 0900 next morning.
3. 610 set is listened to by the Germans. Be careful what you say.

APPENDIX B

BATTLE CASUALTIES SUSTAINED BY U.S. VII CORPS
6th JUNE-1st JULY 1944

UNIT	TOTAL	TYPE OF CASUALTY			
		Killed	Wounded	Missing	Captured
All Units ...	22,119	2,811	13,564	5,665	79
4th Division ...	5,452	844	3,814	788	6
9th Division ...	2,438	301	2,061	76	
79th Division ...	2,376	240	1,896	240	
90th Division ...	2,399	386	1,979	34	
82nd A/B Division ..	4,480	457	1,440	2,571	12
101st A/B Division ...	4,670	546	2,217	1,907	
Corps Troops ...	304	37	157	49	61

Source : U.S. 7th Corps, G-1 Reports, June 1944.

APPENDIX C

TEXT OF ORDER OF THE COMMANDER OF THE
GERMAN SEVENTH ARMY FOR BREAK-THROUGH
TO THE COAST, AUGUST 1944

The following order was signed by the German Commander of the Seventh Army.

'The Führer has ordered the execution of a break-through to the coast to create the basis for the decisive operation against the Allied invasion front. For this purpose, further forces are being brought up to the Army.

'On the successful execution of the operation the Führer has ordered depends the decision of the War in the West, and with it perhaps the decision of the war itself. Commanders of all ranks must be absolutely clear about the enormous significance of this fact. I expect all corps and divisional commanders to take good care that all officers are aware of the unique significance of the whole situation. Only one thing counts, unceasing effort and determined will to victory.

For Führer, Volk and Reich,
HAUSSER.
(Date not known)

APPENDIX D

ESTIMATED TONNAGE OF BOMBS DROPPED ON
THE UNITED KINGDOM 1939-45¹

TABLE 1

					100 Metric tons
1939	...	...	...	...	
1940	...	...	...	...	34,870 " "
1941	...	...	...	...	22,176 " "
1942	...	...	...	...	3,032 " "
1943	...	...	...	...	2,239 " "
1944	...	...	...	...	1,963 " "
1945	...	...	...	...	13 " "
1944-45 (Flying-bombs and rockets)	...	...	...	...	6,602 " "
					70,995

TABLE 2

ESTIMATED TONNAGE OF BOMBS DROPPED ON LONDON CIVIL
DEFENCE REGION, 1939-45

					8,200 Metric Tons
1940-41	...	...	...	...	
1942	...	...	...	...	7 " "
1943	...	...	...	...	142 " "
1944	...	...	...	...	939 " "
1944-45 (Flying-bombs)	...	...	...	...	2,416 " "
1944-45 (Rockets)	...	...	...	...	518 " "
					12,222

¹ Civil Defence Department of the Home Office, *vide*: History of the 2nd World War—*Problems of Social Policy* (United Kingdom Civil Series). By Richard M. Titmuss. *Appendix 7*, p. 556.

APPENDIX E

ALLIED ORDER OF BATTLE FOR FINAL OFFENSIVE¹

SIXTH ARMY GROUP (Devers)

2nd French Armoured Division (Le Clerc)
27th French Alpine Division (Molle)
1st French Infantry Division (Garbay)

First French Army (De Tassigny)

9th French Colonial Infantry Division (Valluy)

I French Corps (Bethouart)

1st French Armoured Division (Sudre)
4th French Mountain Division (De Hesdin)
14th French Infantry Division (Salan)

II French Corps (De Montsabert)

5th French Armoured Division (De Vernejoul)
2nd Moroccan Division (Carpentier)
3rd Algerian Division (Guillaume)

Seventh U.S. Army (Patch)

103rd U.S. Infantry Division (McAuliffe)
36th U.S. Infantry Division (Dahlquist)
44th U.S. Infantry Division (Dean)

VI U.S. Corps (Brooks)

100th U.S. Infantry Division (Burress)
10th U.S. Armoured Division (Morris)
63rd U.S. Infantry Division (Hibbs)

XV U.S. Corps (Haislip)

3rd U.S. Infantry Division (O'Daniel)
45th U.S. Infantry Division (Frederick)
14th U.S. Armoured Division (Smith)

XXI U.S. Corps (Milburn)

42nd U.S. Infantry Division (Collins)
4th U.S. Infantry Division (Blakely)
12th U.S. Armoured Division (Allen)

Third U.S. Army (Patton)

70th U.S. Infantry Division (Barnett)

VIII U.S. Corps (Middleton)

89th U.S. Infantry Division (Finley)
87th U.S. Infantry Division (Culin)
65th U.S. Infantry Division (Reinhart)

XII U.S. Corps (Eddy)

71st U.S. Infantry Division (Wyman)
26th U.S. Infantry Division (Paul)
11th U.S. Armoured Division (Dager)
90th U.S. Infantry Division (Earnest)

XX U.S. Corps (Walker)

80th U.S. Infantry Division (McBride)
6th U.S. Armoured Division (Grow)
76th U.S. Infantry Division (Schmidt)
4th U.S. Armoured Division (Hodge)

¹ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, p. 548.

First U.S. Army (Hodges)

20th U.S. Armoured Division (Ward)

III U.S. Corps (Van Fleet)

99th U.S. Infantry Division (Lauer)
 7th U.S. Armoured Division (Hasbrouck)
 9th U.S. Infantry Division (Craig)
 28th U.S. Infantry Division (Cota)
 5th U.S. Infantry Division (Irwin)

V U.S. Corps (Huebner)

9th U.S. Armoured Division (Leonard)
 2nd U.S. Infantry Division (Robertson)
 69th U.S. Infantry Division (Reinhardt)

VII U.S. Corps (Collins)

1st U.S. Infantry Division (Andrus)
 3rd U.S. Armoured Division (Hickey)
 104th U.S. Infantry Division (Allen)

XVIII U.S. Airborne Corps (Ridgway)

8th U.S. Infantry Division (Moore)
 78th U.S. Infantry Division (Parker)
 97th U.S. Infantry Division (Halsey)
 86th U.S. Infantry Division (Melosky)
 13th U.S. Armoured Division (Wogan)

Fifteenth U.S. Army (Gerow)

66th U.S. Infantry Division (Kramer)
 106th U.S. Infantry Division (Stroh)
 16th U.S. Armoured Division (Pierce)

XXII U.S. Corps (Harmon)

82nd U.S. Airborne Division (Gavin)
 101st U.S. Airborne Division (Taylor)
 94th U.S. Infantry Division (Malony)

XXIII U.S. Corps (Balmer)

Ninth U.S. Army (Simpson)

29th U.S. Infantry Division (Gerhardt)

XIII U.S. Corps (Gillem)

5th U.S. Armoured Division (Oliver)
 84th U.S. Infantry Division (Bolling)
 102nd U.S. Infantry Division (Keating)

XVI U.S. Corps (Anderson)

79th U.S. Infantry Division (Wyche)
 8th U.S. Armoured Division (Devine)
 95th U.S. Infantry Division (Twaddle)

75th U.S. Infantry Division (Anderson)
 35th U.S. Infantry Division (Baade)
 17th U.S. Airborne Division (Miley)

XIX U.S. Corps (McLain)

83rd U.S. Infantry Division (Macon)
 2nd U.S. Armoured Division (White)
 30th U.S. Infantry Division (Hobbs)

TWENTY-FIRST ARMY GROUP (Montgomery)

79th British Armoured Division (Hobart)

Second British Army (Dempsey)

1 British Corps (Crocker)
 8 British Corps (Barker)
 15th British Infantry Division (Barber)
 11th British Armoured Division (Roberts)
 6th British Airborne Division (Bols)

12 British Corps (Ritchie)

7th British Armoured Division (Lyne)
 53rd British Infantry Division (Ross)
 52nd British Infantry Division (Hakewell-Smith)

30 British Corps (Horrocks)

3rd British Infantry Division (Whistler)
 43rd British Infantry Division (Thomas)
 51st British Infantry Division (McMillan)
 Guards Armoured Division (Adair)

First Canadian Army (Crerar)

1 Canadian Corps (Foulkes)
 49th British Infantry Division (Rawlins)
 5th Canadian Armoured Division (Hoffmeister)

2 Canadian Corps (Simonds)

Polish Armoured Division (Maczek)
 2nd Canadian Infantry Division (Matthews)
 3rd Canadian Infantry Division (Spry)
 4th Canadian Armoured Division (Vokes)

FIRST ALLIED AIRBORNE ARMY (Brereton)

13th U.S. Airborne Division (Chapman)

IX Troop Carrier Command (Williams)

52nd Troop Carrier Wing (Clark)
 53rd Troop Carrier Wing (Beach)
 50th Troop Carrier Wing (Chappell)

FIRST TACTICAL AIR FORCE (Webster)

XII Tactical Air Command (Barcus)
 First French Air Corps (Geradet)

NINTH U.S. AIR FORCE (Vandenberg)

IX Tactical Air Command (Quesada)
 XIX Tactical Air Command (Weyland)
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- A.F.96* (Ger. artillery ferry-barge) ; destroyed off Fécamp by *Middleton* and U.S. patrol, 27th Aug., 18.
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